

Bob Lillie, 22 August 1920 - 26 October 2000

By C. Edward Wall

Bob Lillie, long-time resident of Pittsfield Township, supervisor of the township from 1969 to 1984, and devoted member of the Pittsfield Township Historical Society, passed away on 26 October 2000. No resident of Pittsfield Township has had a more significant impact on the township or done more to shape and direct its future. And no one was more interested in or devoted to preserving the historical record of the township.

On 14 November 2000, the Pittsfield Township Board of Trustees presented the following tribute to Margaret Lillie. The tribute -- beautifully matted and framed -- was signed by all seven members of the township board. The tribute was written on their behalf by C. Edward Wall.

Tribute to Bob and Margaret Lillie

With the care of his loving wife, Margaret, Bob Lillie recovered from serious injuries incurred during World War II -- injuries from which he was not expected to survive. Given a second chance at life, Bob devoted his life to others. And all our lives have been affected and enriched by that devotion.

After World War II, Bob and Margaret came to Pittsfield Township, where they raised their immediate family of five children. They devoted their lives and love to those children. And when their first son reached school age, Bob's career in public life also commenced. It began when a taxicab pulled up in front of their house on Dayton drive, to take their son to a distant elementary school in Ypsilanti. Bob and several of his neighbors became active in the Pittsfield fractional school district, were elected to the school board, and saw to the construction of Carpenter School in order to provide a neighborhood school for their children.

About that time, the first major apartment complexes were built in Pittsfield Township -- and many more were being planned. Bob and his neighbors organized to replace the township board, which was closely aligned with these developments. Thus began Bob's leadership of Pittsfield Township, which he served as Supervisor from 1969 to 1984.

Bob was practical and frugal, but farsighted. He understood that a land, which for thousands of years had stood at the crossroads of a great people -- the historic Saginaw-Maumee and Sauk trails -- would continue to serve that function into the future. And a land so situated, could not help but be developed. The question, then, was how that development should be directed. Bob implemented the first systematic land-use plans in township history and worked to see Pittsfield become the first charter township in Washtenaw County. Under Bob's leadership, the township acquired 23 acres on Michigan Avenue -- in the center of the Township -- for future township offices. He pushed for the acquisition of Montibeller Park, and subsequently negotiated an agreement with the Michigan State Highway Commission to acquire acreage at the intersection of I-94 and US-23, for a future park -- later designated Lillie Park in his honor.

Bob implemented a fledgling utilities infrastructure in Pittsfield Township and developed personal expertise in the subject. At a time of economic depression and scarce dollars, he guided utilities with great skill, building the basis for what is today a significant enterprise.

Always devoted to public well-being and safety, Bob strongly supported a paid on-call volunteer fire department as well as the establishment of Pittsfield's first police force. This led to the construction of the first building at Pittsfield Township's new service center on Michigan Avenue -- a fire department that also served as the residence for a fire chief and assistant fire chief. Those residences later became the offices of an expanding police force. Bob subsequently pushed for the strategic merger of these two services into a Department of Public Safety.

While these accomplishments have been very significant, they do not reveal fully the true impact that Bob has had on our lives. Bob was motivated by the highest sense of service and commitment to others, and he reflected that in all relations with other persons. One of Pittsfield Township's highest-ranking staff members recently described the impact that Bob had on him. As a young candidate for his first position as a police officer, he came to ask Bob Lillie for a job. Bob spoke to him of loyalty, commitment, service, and purpose -- so moving and affecting the young man, that he never has forgotten those words -- and he has always strived to live up to the expectations of the person who first hired him. During Bob's years of public service, there have been thousands of persons similarly touched and moved -- and motivated -- by him.

Bob's leadership by example; his calm, quiet, astute, gentle, but firm guidance; his concern and constant compassion, as reflected in all his actions; his sincere interest in the best for everyone he touched; and his warmth as a friend and colleague -- have established a legacy for all who follow him in the service to others.

Pittsfield Township has been blessed by Margaret and Bob Lillie choosing to make their lives here. As a result of that very personal decision, they have not only raised a family, but have nurtured the quality growth of a great community. We thank Margaret for caring for Bob, her family and community, and for sharing Bob with us. And we thank Bob for devoting so much of his life to all of us.

Bob and Margaret Lillie have lived their lives as examples to all of us. We take this occasion to re-dedicate ours to the service of others in the tradition and legacy of Bob and Margaret Lillie.

And to both of them, we express our loving thanks.