

LAKE BELLA VISTA 100 YEARS

In 2015, Lake Bella Vista will be 100 years old!

Rev. William Baker and his wife Mary owned property along Sugar Creek north of Bentonville, and in 1915, they decided to dam up the creek and create a lake for a summer resort. However they soon gave up on that idea, and in late 1916 they sold the lake and surrounding property to the Linebarger Brothers, who did build a summer resort and opened it in June 1917. The Linebargers operated the resort until 1952, when they sold it to E. L. Keith, who kept it until 1963, when he sold it to John Cooper, Sr., whose company later became Cooper Communities.

In 1996, the Bentonville/Bella Vista Chamber of Commerce Leadership Class decided as their class project to develop a group of trails for the area. According to the Weekly Vista of July 11, 2001, the group first came up with a plan for bike trails, then established themselves as a non-profit organization which they named the Trailblazers, after which they began talking with Mr. Cooper about gaining access to build a bike trail around Lake Bella Vista, the only lake in Bella Vista not owned and maintained by the Property Owners Association. Instead of just giving them access, Cooper decided to give them the lake and 70 surrounding acres.

While raising funds through donations and grants, the group started trail construction around the lake in August, 2000, but it took longer than expected due to the extensive dredging operation required to improve the quality of the lake. The Weekly Vista reported on July 16, 2003, that the dredging was nearly complete after three years. Tons of lake sediment were removed at no expense to the group in return for allowing an excavating company to sell the removed material as landfill. Some of it was used as landfill for a strip of land between the south end of Lake Bella Vista and County Road 40, on top of which a Walgreen's Pharmacy and several other buildings were later built.

On September 7, 2004, the Village Art Club, which owns the Wishing Spring Gallery, granted property alongside the gallery to be used for a trail, which enabled the Trailblazers to realize their goal of connecting the lake trail with a trail into Bentonville. At some point in time, the legal description was changed from Wishing "Spring" to Wishing "Springs," so the trail is now called the Wishing Springs Trail, but the gallery is still the Wishing Spring Gallery, named for the old dairy barn it occupies, the Wishing Spring Dairy, whose original water source was one spring across the road up on the hill.

The Trailblazers asked the City of Bentonville to take over Lake Bella Vista as a city park (this was before the City of Bella Vista existed), and the lake was annexed into the City of Bentonville on September 25, 2005. Even though the lake is now part of the City of Bentonville, it is still recognized as the origin of Bella Vista. The Bella Vista Historical Museum will have several events in 2015 to celebrate the 100 year anniversary.

Attachments:

Picture 1: A bicyclist rides along the Wishing Springs trail below the buildings that have been built on the landfill between the south end of Lake Bella Vista and County Road 40.

Picture 2: When Lake Bella Vista was last dredged in the 2000-2003 timeframe, a wide mound of dirt across Highway 71 from the old Log House, now known as the Artist Retreat Center, was not hauled off but was left beside the lake. That may contribute to flooding problems in the area just south of that mound.

