



# Kings Of 'The Hill'

## Wheeling Neighborhood An Oasis For Village's Public Servants

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Journal & Topics Reporter

When Wheeling Village Trustee Ray Lang first moved into his home on Berkshire Lane in the early 1990s, his father teased him. "You know what this means," he said. "You'll become a trustee."

Lang brushed it off, but eventually his father's prediction came true. It seems as if a life in public service is inevitable for the residents of "Trustee Row," or "The Hill," the back-to-back blocks of Berkshire and Mockingbird Lanes in Wheeling that have been home to an impressive amount of local political figures through the years.

This enclave of Wheeling, which sits at a slightly higher elevation than surrounding blocks, was given the name The Hill in the early '70s by current trustee and former village president Bill Hein who bought his home from former School District 21 Supt. Kenneth Gill. Hein's neighborhood reminded him of

a similar "hill" he had visited in St. Louis during his career in sales. When asked why political types like to stay together in Wheeling, Hein said, "I think it was because most of the people who lived there were active in the community."

He explained that the neighborhood, also called Highland Glen, began as an up-and-coming area in the late 1950s and early '60s. "People who had already lived in Wheeling moved there," said Hein. So, many residents of The Hill already had connections and interests in the town by the time they settled in their new homes.

As of 2015, 21 trustees, commissioners and public board members have resided in Trustee Row. One of the earliest was trustee John Koeppen who is the only member Hein remembers living there before him.

Others in Hein's generation of The Hill include village trustees Ed Buerger, John Cole, Don Jackson, Charlie Kerr and Gil Monoson, plan commission-

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ers Bill Maloney and Jack Metzger as well as Skipp Hedlund, who worked on both boards.

Many of these figures raised their families on The Hill, as did Hein. "We had a lot of things in common," said the trustee. Being the same age and having similar passions for public service bonded the neighborhood, according to Hein.

The Arlington Club, which runs behind the backyards of homes on Berkshire, also brought together the growing community, as did trustee Hein's pool.

"Some of us were on opposite side politically," he admits, "but everyone was still invited to my pool in the summer."

Lang, whose father Albert was also a trustee, grew up in the nearby Dunhurst area of Wheeling, and knew trustee Hein as a young man, even briefly working for him.

The sense of community he felt at home led him to return to Wheeling after studying journalism at Southern Illinois University.

Hein said, "That's what The Hill is all about," and that type of dedication to the village through generations is what makes the area a "political powerhouse."

Today, 10 members of various boards live on Trustee Row including Lang, Jim Ruffato and Don Johnson of the plan commission, Dan Patlak of the Cook County Board of Review, Mike Kurgan of the park board and its president Keith Pecka, Village Trustee Dave Vogel and Village President Dean Argiris.

Pride and investment in the community remains a staple of the neighborhood. According to Lang, "It's a great street with a lot of great neighbors," and "people are in tune with the government" even if they don't hold a political position.

To keep the community strong, The Hill brought back its annual block party last year. Now, its busy homeowners have a chance to socialize, and of course address community issues.

"It can be a thankless job," said Lang of the 24/7 responsibility of political life, but "people want to get things done" on Trustee Row.