

ALPINE BOOM ERA

Decade of '70s brought retail, industrial advancements in county

Following the 1960s, a decade chalked full of rapid and tremendous change for Gaylord, Otsego County Chamber of Commerce Executive Manager Harry Collins retired in 1970, leaving the chamber in the hands of Ed Calkins.

Calkins, a former General Motors executive who with his wife had moved to Otsego County in 1961 and purchased Ken Mar On-the-Hill (now Norden Hem), immediately put his organizational skills to work at the chamber.

In a recent interview about his days as chamber manager, Calkins painted this profile as a chamber executive director or manager: "One-quarter business / financier; one-quarter entrepreneur; one-quarter politician, and one-quarter preacher, with the ability to use the most appropriate one-quarter up front to maintain harmony, strength and progress."

Organization was Calkins' strongest point, he admitted. While Collins had dealt with major change — construction of I-75, the revitalization of downtown, location of industry, the establishment of Alpenfest — Calkins' arrival called for some major organization efforts.

His first step was incorporation of the Alpenfest and appointment



Ed Calkins

of Jim Mongeau as the corporation's general manager. Volunteers had been swamped in years past, and to keep the festival going, the chamber decided incorporation and a general manager were critical. It worked.

It was during Calkins' administration, too, the Gaylord Air Industrial Park was constructed by the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), a second chamber corporation.

During Calkins' tenure, a \$1 million Economic Development Administration grant was secured for the park's development, and it was IDC members with the Gaylord State Bank who raised

the \$200,000 needed as the local match for the grant.

By 1975, a year after Calkins retired from the chamber position, the park was ready to sell land.

Calkins considers the park's development a highlight of his chamber career, and a strength of the community as it continues to lure industry here, providing a much needed industrial base to complement the tourism industry.

Other accomplishments marking Calkins' 1970-1974 term as chamber manager included organization of the first Winter Festival in 1972; involvement in a Ferris State College internship program for students interested in chamber careers, and participation in establishment of the Council of Chambers of Commerce in northern Michigan and the Michigan Association of Festival and Events.

On the occasion of the chamber's 50th anniversary this year, Calkins said he had little doubt when he purchased Ken Mar in 1961 that Gaylord would become the hub it has.

He agrees with the split the chamber board made last year, separating the chamber of commerce and the tourism and convention bureau. "It's the only way to go," he said.

"It truly gives us two organizations working hand in glove to give us a handle (on growth) so it won't get beyond us," he concluded.

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