

Ozaukee

County

NEWS GRAPHIC

OZAUKEE COUNTY'S NEWSPAPER SINCE 1883

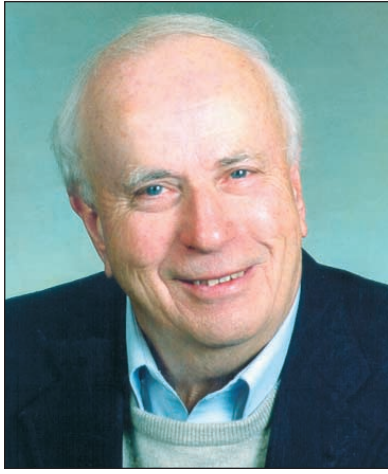
McGinnis was instrumental in saving Jonathan Clark House

Cedarburg resident purchased historic Mequon structure so it could be preserved

By Gary Achterberg
News Graphic Staff

MEQUON — A love of architecture, a keen appreciation for education and a genuine desire to help others in the community all defined Jerry McGinnis.

McGinnis, a Cedarburg resident and the founder of Mequon-based Embassy



McGinnis

Homes, died March 24. He was 84.

McGinnis' interest and support played a key role in the preservation and renovation of the Jonathan Clark House. When Dr. Greg Custer put the 1848 home that he had used as an office on the market in 2012, then-Mayor Curt Gielow and others sought ways to preserve the home and turn it into a community asset.

McGinnis saw an article in the News Graphic, contacted Gielow and purchased the property to give the Mequon Community Foundation time to raise funds and buy it back

from him. The house at Cedarburg and Bonniwell roads has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1982.

"He admired that house," said his daughter, Kathy Schmidt, who said he drove past it every day on his way to work.

"When he saw it come for sale, he felt it was something he had to help preserve," added his son, Tim McGinnis.

Gielow said he is grateful that "Jerry stepped forward in a big way" when he was looking for someone to share his vision of restoring and preserving the historic building.

"Mr. McGinnis loved beautiful architecture and his admiration of the old Jonathan Clark House history, plus his generous heart, made the initial acquisition possible," the former mayor said. "A great honor our communities could give Jerry would be to see the funding of the Jonathan Clark House Museum come to fruition."

Tim McGinnis said his father also was attracted to the project because horticulture students from Milwaukee Area Technical College's campus in Mequon were involved with improving the grounds.

McGinnis: Devotion to education recalled

Jerry McGinnis' love and respect for education was a recurring theme as one of his two sons and his daughter remembered their father. He served on the MATC Foundation Board and funded scholarships targeted to people in the construction trades.

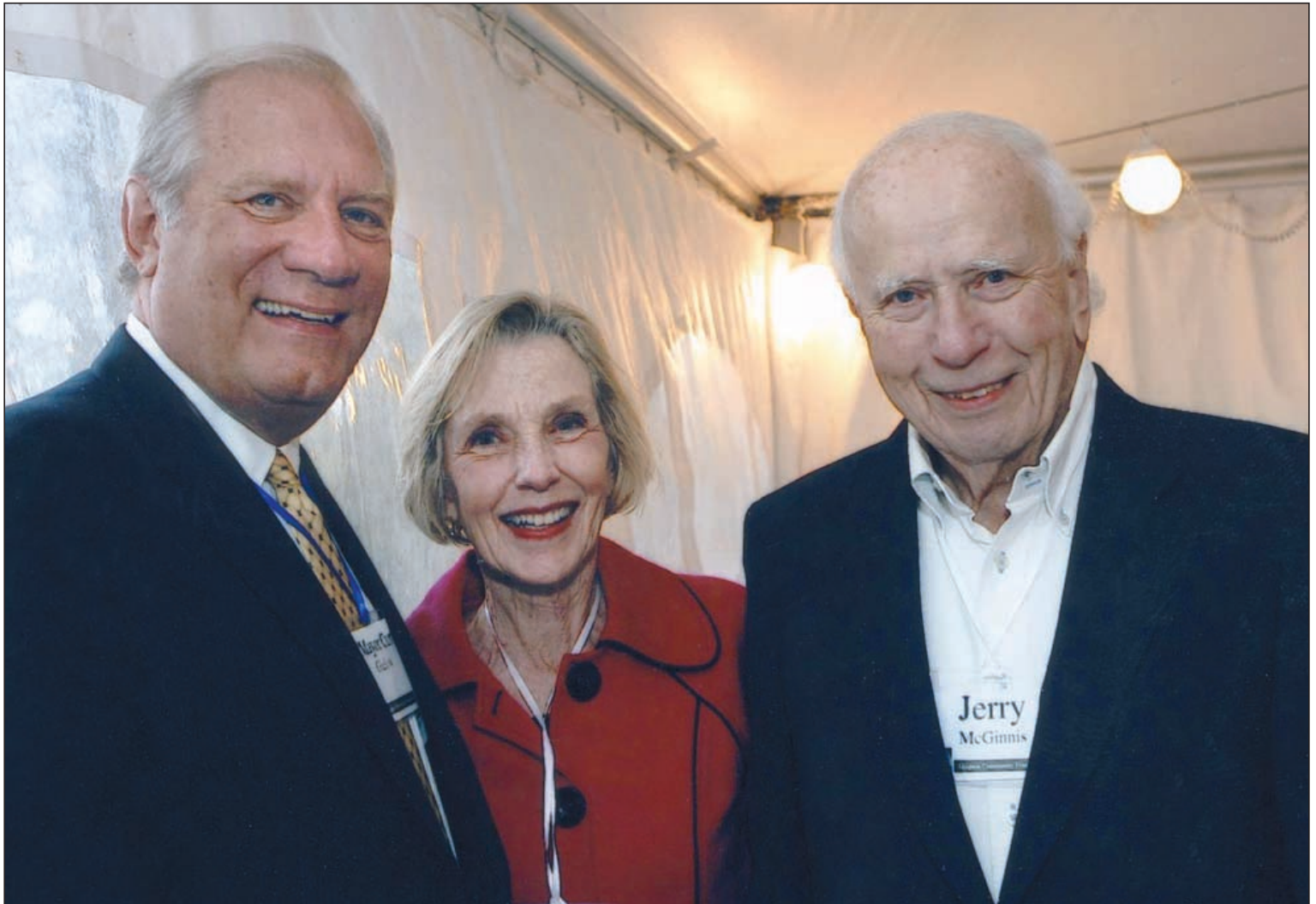
"The cool thing is whenever MATC would have a banquet (to award scholarships), they would have some of the recipients speak," Schmidt said. "You just walked out of there inspired. And he would love to sit and talk with them. It wasn't just that he wrote a check — he liked getting involved; it was so hands-on."

He also actively supported scholarships for high school students in Cedarburg and for civil engineering students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, his alma mater.

Jerry McGinnis built Embassy Builders from the ground up. He started off in 1961 with partners building apartments near the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee campus. He later branched off on his own and built single-family homes, later moving the offices from Milwaukee to Mequon. In some years, the company built and sold more than 100 homes annually.

Schmidt said she recalls her mother was concerned on many occasions by steps that he took to grow the business, including borrowing against an insurance policy while they were raising three children. Both children said he played an active role in the business until shortly before his death.

Jerry McGinnis also had a lifelong passion for classic cars. Schmidt said he recently bought a machine shop in Hamilton to store all of his cars in one location. She said there was reason behind every car that he



Submitted photo

Jerry McGinnis, right, attended a reception celebrating the acquisition of the Jonathan Clark House in 2012 with his wife, Barbara, and then-Mequon Mayor Curt Gielow.

bought.

Tim McGinnis said his favorite car was a 1940 Buick. He found one in Thiensville through a classified ad, bought it and restored it. A story

written years ago in The Milwaukee Journal said he bought that car because it was the same as the first car he had when he got out of school and he had to get rid of it when he

joined the Navy.

Those classic cars played a role in his funeral on Friday. After the funeral and the reception, everyone was invited to Hamilton for a car show.