

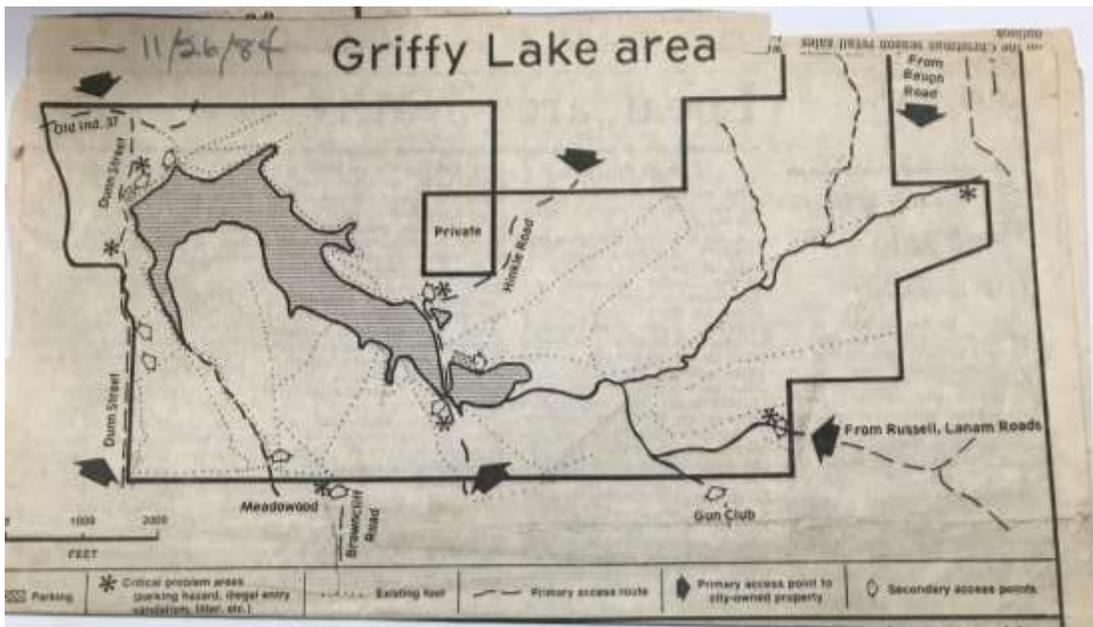
Blue Ridge: The Mini-Series

Episode Five:

Love Is All Around Us

Linda and Paul Kern

Preface: When we first envisioned Episode Five, we wanted to take in all our surrounding neighbors (Cascades Park, State Road 37, Matlock Heights etc.) in one glance. But as we were preparing the text, we realized that this would be a mistake. Our neighbors are so interesting, to put them together would be a disservice to each of them. So, we decided to do installments instead. The first installment is about our wet neighbor to the east:



The Desperate Search for Water

When we look down on Griffy Lake today we see a land filled with activities such as boat riding, trail hiking and fishing. But it also serves

as a memorial to the desperate search for an adequate, reliable source of water that occurred from the late 1800s to the mid-1900s. Vicious water shortages, that would be wholly unimaginable today, were common. They almost destroyed both the city and the university.

Initially, Bloomington got its public water from town wells located around the courthouse square. However, when an IU professor, in 1890, used purple dye in the outhouses and later saw that same purple dye in the town wells, he knew people were drinking their own sewage. A new source of water was needed.

Between 1890 and 1910 the city created 3 artificial lakes (Twin Lakes, Weimer Lake and Leonard Springs Lake). These series of lakes were meant to supply the city with water. The water was shipped into town either by piping or by wagon. Unfortunately, the attempt was doomed to fail because the foundations for the lakes were made of subsurface limestone pockmarked with caverns and passages that siphoned surface water underground through sinkholes.

FUN FACT: Limestone is prevalent in the western part of Monroe County. It is porous and leaks a lot, so it is difficult to retain water on a base of limestone.

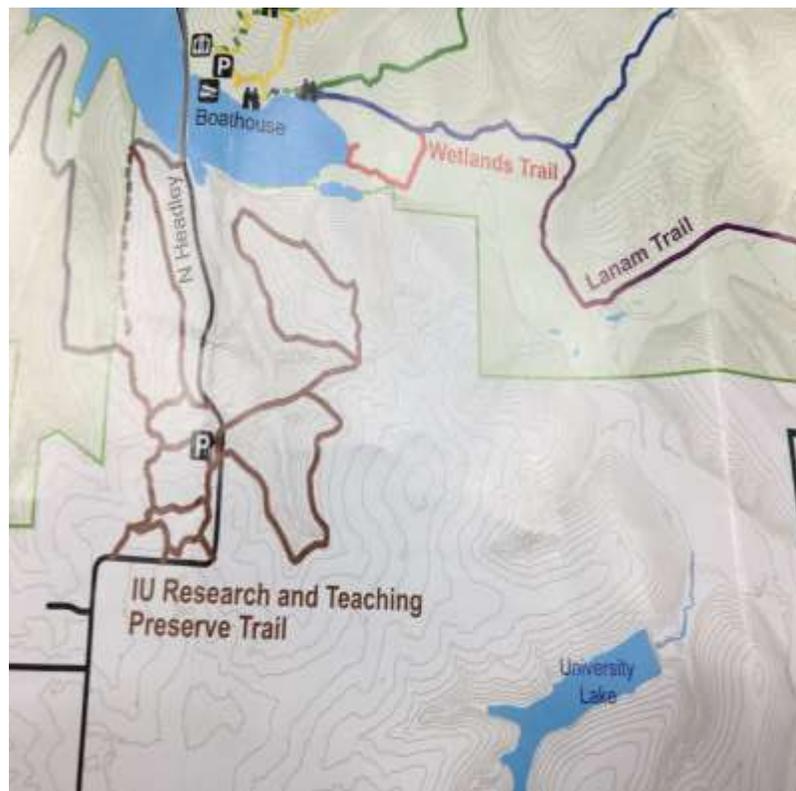
From the beginning, the “ghost in the room” for most Bloomingtonians was whether the series of lakes would be adequate to supply the area in case of a severe drought. Even in the best of times, people used rainwater collected in their cisterns to supplement the city water supply.....which routinely tasted awful!

Because of these ongoing water travails, townsfolk also bought water from farmers hauling it up and down the streets in water wagons holding up to 3-4 thousand gallons. People made a living supplying water to the town and they represented the first water delivery service,

like Hinkley Springs is now. The only difference is that now we get delivered water as an alternative to an already abundant supply of city water, then they bought it to perform basic activities for survival like drinking, washing and cooking.

FUN FACT: What a difference a couple of generations makes!!

The most serious test of the water system was in 1910 and 1911 when severe droughts occurred. The system performed poorly, and Indiana University was threatened with having to leave Bloomington because of the water supply shortage. In response, IU created University Lake in 1911 on what is now part of the IU golf course in order to supply the University.





Following a drought in 1910–1911, the university dammed a stream to create a lake, pictured above and opposite, that is located near the IU golf course today. The university, which used 90,000 gallons a day, had been dependent on city water.



The university lake site had not been cleared before damming and cattle and hogs from nearby farms were grazing in the watershed. A report to President Bryan in 1913 recommended purchasing the rest of the watershed and trying to achieve storage capacity of 40 million gallons by extending and raising the dam. Eventually, IU again used city water to supplement its own plant. IU's consumption of city water rose from 48.8 to 170 million gallons per year between 1942 and 1950 as enrollment skyrocketed following World War II.

By 1913, the University was looking to expand the lake's capacity to 40 million gallons. University Lake kept IU from leaving Bloomington, but water shortages would continue.

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As the situation got worse and the series of lakes fell further and further behind, water shortages became more common. By early 1920

businesses were threatening to leave, and a large business refused to come to, Bloomington if the water shortages were not solved. Mass meetings on the courthouse grounds, like the one below, were held to decide what to do. (Note the speaker on the platform with the American flag at the upper left of the photo)



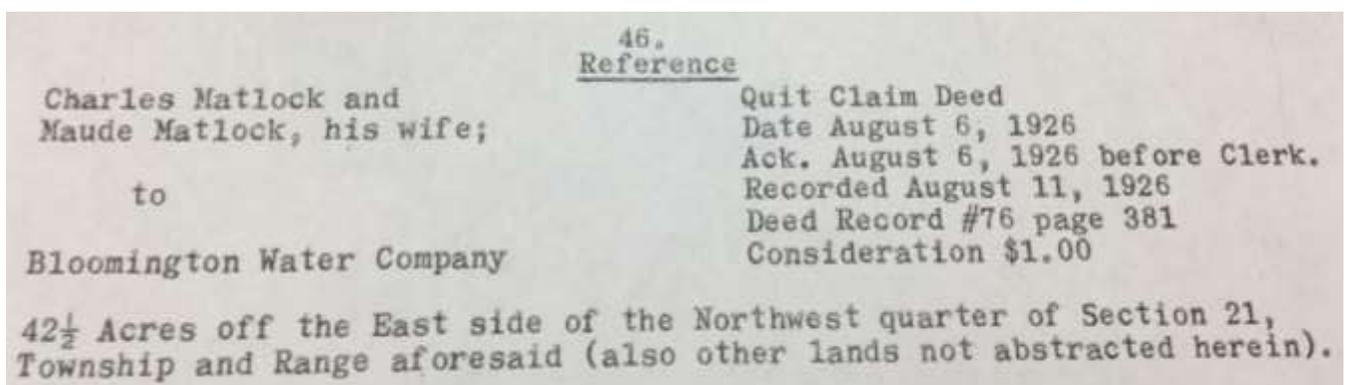
In December 1920, the city chooses to abandon the west side lake system and instead dam up Griffith Creek on the north-east side of Bloomington. The cost would be \$1,000,000 (\$13,000,000 in today's money) The town spent the next four years raising the cash necessary for the new dam. During that time, water shortages continued to occur. In 1922, IU students were nor permitted to shower or bathe in their residences or Greek houses. Instead, they went to a common area to help ration water. There was talk of suspending the fall semester because of the water shortage.

FUN FACT: Ernie Pyle, later a WW2 war correspondent, was editor of the Indiana Daily Student, Indiana University's student newspaper, in 1922 and was influential in raising funds for the new dam.

When the financing for the construction of the new lake was finally secured in March of 1924, 10,000 people celebrated on the town square, shutting down businesses that day.

Work on Griffy Lake was completed in late 1924, and not a moment too soon. The west side lake system was seriously failing; by early January of 1925, Leonard Springs Lake was played out and the pumps could no longer function. Griffy had to come online immediately. Without Griffy, Bloomington's water supply would have been almost non-existent. It literally saved the town.

FUN FACT: One year later, in 1926 the Bloomington Water Company bought 42.5 acres from Charles Matlock to build a water treatment plant next to the dam, across from Dunn Road. The land purchased extended from the present-day Lakewood area north to State Road 37. The plant remained in that spot until it was razed in 2019.



Given the heroic efforts of Griffy, it was felt the city's water supply was now secure, but that was not the case. The populations of both

Bloomington and IU grew on such a scale that Griffy was inadequate, and water shortages continued to occur. The years 1934-37, saw severe drought and rationing of water was in effect on a routine basis. Typically, a household would be given notice that they had a specified 2-3 hours in the day to turn their taps on and that was it; no more.

The last of the severe droughts occurred in 1946, when the combination of a summer drought and an onslaught of post WW2 students caused the campus to close temporarily, resulting in a month-long delay to the start of the semester.

The water shortage problems were solved when Bean-Blossom Creek was dammed up in 1953, forming the Bean-Blossom Lake (aka Lake Lemon). The combination of Lakes Griffy and Lemon gave Bloomington a relatively secure water supply.

FUN FACT: There were some who were unhappy with the change from Bean-Blossom Lake to Lake Lemon because it was named after Mayor Tom Lemon of Bloomington. They hoped that the city fathers would not continue with this trend and change Bloomington's name to "Lemongrad".

The problem of supplying water to Bloomington was utterly obliterated with the opening of Lake Monroe in 1966. Originally proposed in 1949, it was created by the Army Corps of Engineers as a water flood plain to control flooding in the Ohio and Wabash river regions as well as to regulate the flow down Clear Creek to White River so as to provide a year round supply of water to the utilities and other industries that needed it for cooling. Supplying water to Bloomington was not even on the radar as a major goal. But Bloomington gained a near infinite

amount of water that would put to bed any thoughts of water shortages in the future..... forever!!!

To illustrate this point: There was a significant drought throughout the Midwest in 1988 that severely affected many communities. Some of us may remember it.

The Bloomington water supply was so good that no activities were curtailed, and the city was encouraging people to participate in water related activities (“wash your car, water your lawn, use the water slide”). Something that would have resulted in a severe water shortage 40 years earlier was now just another day at the office.

FUN FACT: The size differences between the four lakes we have mentioned (University, Griffy, Lemon and Monroe) are immense. The map below shows how each lake is exponentially different from the others.

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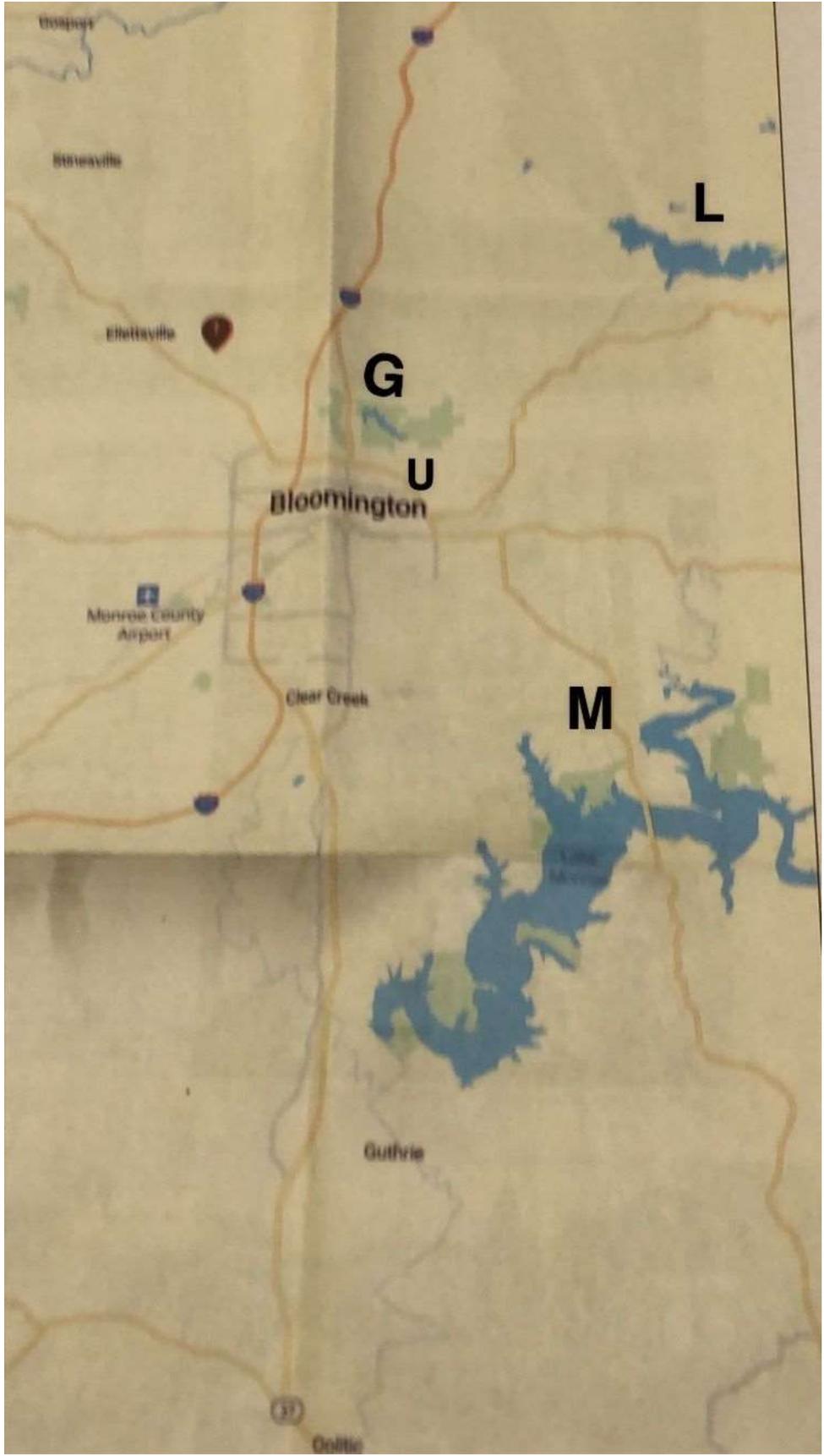
U= University Lake (not even visible on the map because of its small size)

G= Griffy Lake (barely visible)

L= Lake Lemon

M= Lake Monroe

NOTE: Size determines whether it is name+lake or lake+name



G

U

L

M

After the completion of Lakes Monroe and Lemon, Griffy Lake was only an ancillary source of water for Bloomington but could produce up to 2-3 million gallons a day. However, by the early 1980s, the structure was falling into disrepair. So, in 1982, the dam was drained, and a major overhaul of the structure was put into effect.



FUN FACT: While the lake was drained, the fish were restocked. The undesirable carp and shad were removed and replaced with game fish such as largemouth bass, channel catfish, bluegill and redear sunfish. (Note: Recently, there was an invasion of elodea, an invasive fish species, that required draining and dredging of the lake. It was then restocked with the above game fish.)

Despite the overhaul, Griffy's days as a functioning dam were numbered. Lake Monroe was being upgraded and would be able to supply even more water to Bloomington. Instead of an ancillary role, Griffy would only be called on for dire emergencies. It was decommissioned in 1988 with the water treatment plant offline in 1995. The plant was razed in 2019. But that was not the end of Griffy's contributions to Bloomington and IU. Griffy Lake has been not only an important water source, but also has served as a recreational area, although not all recreational activities have been wanted or even legal.

Vandalism and Rowdyism

The Bloomington Utilities Service Board had overseen Griffy since the early 1920s. It treated the lake as an undisturbed nature preserve with only a few trails for hiking. There was no real supervision or regulation of activities.

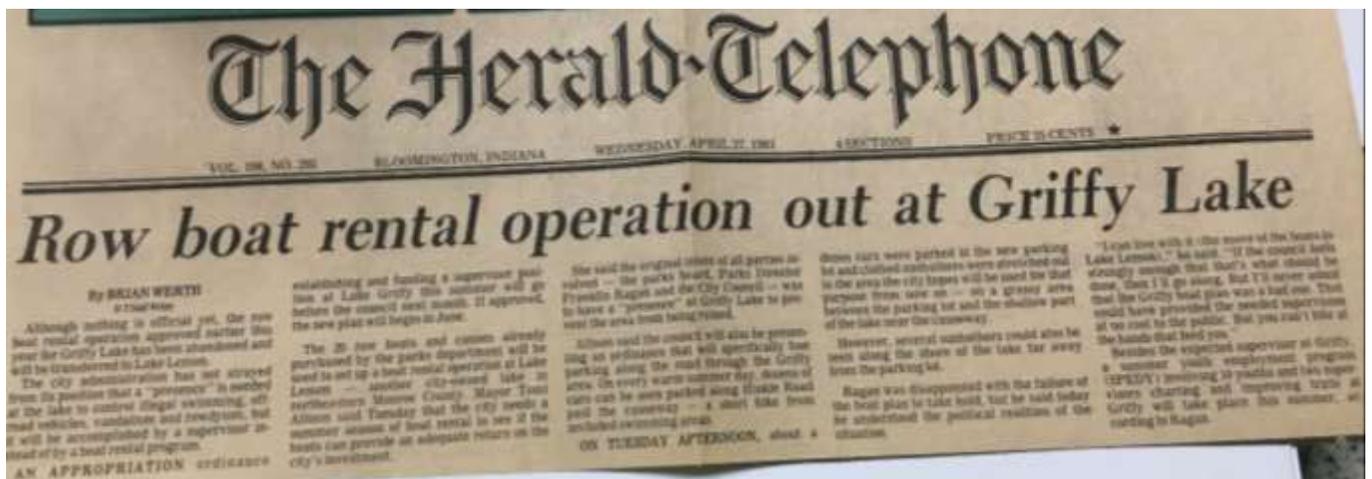
Over time, more and more people began using the lake for (illegal) activities such as swimming, sunbathing, overnight camping, fishing, wood cutting, biking and ATVs on the trails as well as "vandalism and rowdyism". By the late 1970s *hundreds of people* were swimming in Griffy Lake and there were 200-300 cars parked along Hinkle Road and North Dunn Street. There were so many cars on the roads that *ambulances had difficulty getting through during emergencies*. The combination of these unregulated activities resulted in multiple deaths from car accidents as well as drownings (with issues of liability and lawsuits for the city).

FUN FACT: Can you even imagine what kind of a zoo that must have been?

In 1982, it was felt that a larger presence at the lake was needed. The city decided that, while ownership of the facility would remain with the Utility Department, supervision and management should be transferred to the Parks and Recreation Department.

There was much debate within the city as to what purpose the lake should serve for the community. In Blue Ridge, most of the residents did not want the lake disturbed at all. They wanted the Parks and Recreation Department to be removed and no services offered at the lake except hiking. Like most of the people around Griffy Lake they wanted the land left pristine.

But it was difficult not to share a resource only two miles from downtown Bloomington with the rest of the community. It was also believed that Parks and Recreation could provide a presence on Griffy Lake to discourage unwanted activities, such as those noted above. Initially, in 1983, the Parks Department tried to place a boat house on the property to establish a presence, but it was given to Lake Lemon instead.



Over the next few years, the proposed boat rental house was put in place as well as a nature center and seasonal staff to help things run smoothly. The Parks Department has provided supervision and management of the Griffy area since that time. Rowdyism has successfully been curtailed.

Nature Preserve

In 1986, both city and state officials started looking at 250 acres just south of Lake Griffy as a nature preserve. The area was a confluence between the alkaline limestone of western Monroe county with the acidic siltstone and slate of eastern Monroe county. The resulting mixtures gave very distinct plant communities, which had been documented since the turn of the 20th century by IU professors. It was felt this would be a valuable addition for the state. Becoming a nature preserve required approval by the Indiana Natural Resource Commission and a signature by the governor. In 1991 the state awarded the designation of Nature Preserve to Griffy as the 110th member. With this distinction also came state authority to help with the management of activities supervised by the Parks Department on the property.

The North Pointe Affair

Since the early 1970s, there was recognition that Griffy held a crucial spot in the ecology of Monroe County and should be protected. The city had been buying up land around Griffy Lake since the early 1920s and would eventually purchase 45 properties covering 1,200 acres. But they did not have all the land and some developers still saw Griffy as an ideal place for a subdivision. In 1988 a conflict would grow out of the need to preserve nature and develop houses.

Bruce Storm was a developer who had 39 acres of land just east and north of Lake Griffy and he wanted to put up 52 homes on the property, which he called North Pointe.

Mr. Storm needed two concessions from the city to put up the homes. First, he needed the property to be rezoned from an Estate status (one unit per acre) to Single Residential (three units per acre). Second, he needed a roadway into his property, which the city, by law, was required to grant him. However, he wanted a 60-foot easement rather than the customary 15 feet. He needed this because of the increased traffic his development would create.

For his part, Mr. Storm promised to supply the sewer system for the development if he could have 52 homes. He asserted that the cost to install a sewer line would be prohibitive unless he could develop all 52 homes. With fewer than that, he would have to use septic tanks rather than a sewer line, which would be worse on the ecosystem.

There was significant blowback from citizens concerned with the environmental impact on the Griffy Lake- area. They did not want Mr. Storm building any houses at all. In fact, they wanted the city to buy the North Pointe property.



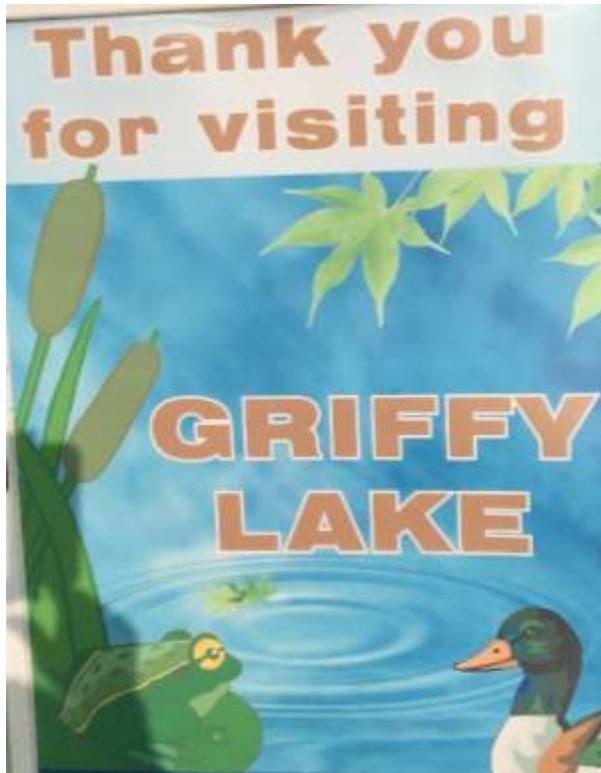
Over the next several years there was a running war between Mr. Storm and ecology concerns. This manifested itself in countless visits to city departments for rezoning or roadway access or septic tanks. Each time Mr. Storm would make some headway in one area, like roadway easement, he would have a reversal in something else, like rezoning. Becoming frustrated, Mr. Storm sued the city in 1990 over the size of the roadway easement. Mr. Storm lost because the original property abstract in 1926 had specified a 15 foot easement and the court relied on that factor in making their decision in favor of the city. Realizing he was not going to get the 52 homes originally planned, Mr. Storm developed 7 homes, each with a 5-acre lot. Many environmentalists were relieved by the much smaller number of new residents north of Griffy (7 actuals versus 52 proposed new homes). The hope was that the lake would remain safe.

The Future of Griffy

For Blue Ridge Residents Griffy Lake is ideally located just off Dunn Street by Kenwood Place. What is really cool about the park is the new 6-mile trail around the lake scheduled to open in 2021. The project is part of the Bicentennial Bond program for the city.



Parks and Recreation manages all the activities around the lake and runs a boat rental shack (maximum 22 boats in the water at one time). It is open on a seasonal basis from April to October.



WE APPRECIATE YOUR KIND ATTENTION!!!!

The next instalment will be:

“Old US 37” and “The By-Pass”

It will look at how the roads around us have drastically changed over the years.