

COMMENTS FOR VETERANS MEMORIAL CIRCLE DEDICATION

I want to thank you all for being here today to help us dedicate Veterans Memorial Circle. Today, we hear a lot about the need for community transformation. There is no question that our community is at a crossroads, and major transformation is needed. It has been needed for a long, long time. Over my career, it has been my experience that transformation does not come easy. It happens by developing a vision, careful planning, community engagement, financial investment in ourselves, and precise execution. But most importantly, it takes dogged determination to stay focused on the vision of transformation, despite the critics, despite the financial or political obstacles, and despite the doubts.

I want to thank the following people for helping make today happen:

- Lee Brown of Teska for the planning of this project
- Hanson Engineers for the design
- Patrick Zuroske, Capital Program Manager
- Matt Vitner, City Engineer
- Tim Hanson, Public Works Director
- Jamie Rott, Project Manager
- William Charles Construction
- Mark Rose and Patrick Hayes of the Legal Department
- Julia Valdez and the RACVB for coordinating this event today
- Jim Hankins and Mark Rice of McClure Engineering
- Scott Sanders, Landscape Architect
- Secretary Schneider, Paul Loete, and Jason Nelson of IDOT
- Former City Councils, especially former Alderman Doug Mark and Bill Timm
- Our State of Illinois legislative delegation
- The Neighborhood groups of North End Square, North End Commons, Edgewater, Churchill's Grove, and Signal Hill
- Tom Johnson, who helped with the concept of Veterans Memorial Circle
- Mary Ann Smith of the Greenwood Cemetery Association
- County Board Chairman Scott Christiansen
- Dave Davis and Jeff Schroeder of the Winnebago County Veterans Association

- Scott Lewandowski, Director of Memorial Hall
- The Current City Council, especially John Beck, Teena Newburg, and Tom McNamara
- Mayor Morrissey, whose vision of Excellence Everywhere for Everyone is a constant inspiration.
- Finally, I want to thank the citizens of Rockford who made this possible through their investment in Rebuilding Rockford.

We stand here today at the crossroads of the intersection of North Main and Auburn Streets, a crossroads rich with history and tradition. These crossroads are bounded by some of the most civically active neighborhood groups that this City has ever seen. Neighborhoods called North End Square, North End Commons, Edgewater, Churchill's Grove, and Signal Hill. When we embarked on this transformational infrastructure project, we set out three objectives: 1) to improve the mobility and safety of the intersection; and 2) to revitalize the business climate at the intersection of North Main and Auburn; and 3) to build an infrastructure project that embodies the civic pride and heritage of this historic intersection, and this historic community.

To our northeast sits Greenwood Cemetery. Thousands of people drive by this cemetery every day, and they drive by without knowing that many of the souls buried there formed and influenced not just this City, but this Country.

When people walk or drive by Greenwood, they probably don't know that some of our most important founding fathers are buried there. People like Lewis Lemon, who was Rockford's only documented slave and who died a free man, and people like John Manny, who developed and produced the Northern Illinois Reaper and started Rockford's Water Power District, who was defended in his famous patent case against John McCormick by a young lawyer named Abraham Lincoln, and President Lincoln's future Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton.

When people walk or drive by, they probably don't know that former Ohio Governor William Bebb is buried there. Bebb was governor of the State of Ohio from 1846 to 1849 and was a strong supporter of racial equality, and served under President Lincoln as an examiner in the pension office at Washington D.C.

When people walk or drive by, they probably don't know that Social Reformer Julia Clifford Lathrop is buried there. A college friend of Hull House founder Jane Addams, Lathrop was a national advocate for women and children, and was appointed by President William Howard Taft to head the Children's Bureau, a part of the Department of Labor, where she served as chief for nine years of her life.

When people walk or drive by, they probably don't know that major political leaders are buried there--people like US Congressman William Lathrop, or US Congressman John Theodore Buckbee.

When people walk or drive by, they probably don't know that James Henry Breasted is buried there, the historian and archaeologist who established the study of Egyptology in the United States and became the foremost scholar in the field. Breasted's discoveries and purchases of artifacts helped shape the American image of past civilizations.

When people walk or drive by, they probably don't know that Charles Roscoe Barnes is buried there, a professional baseball player who was the National League's first batting leader with Chicago in 1876, and the first player to hit a home run in National League history. He was considered the league's finest player. They probably don't know that Stanley Hugh Campbell is buried there, a man who played in the National Football League for nine years, winning three world championship games, and missed out on one-and his best playing years-while serving his country in the military.

Most importantly, when people walk or drive by, they don't realize that 527 soldiers are buried there, soldiers who served this country and sacrificed their lives for our nation's cause of freedom and democracy. They don't know that Loyd Wheaton was buried there, who served as a Major General in the Union Army in the Civil War and who was awarded the Medal of Honor as a Lieutenant Colonel in the 8th Illinois Infantry for his heroic actions at Fort Blakely in Alabama on April 9, 1865. When people walk or drive by, they don't know that Greenwood contains the remains of soldiers lost in every major conflict in U.S. History, including the Revolutionary War.

Most people just don't know that where the Churchill's Grove neighborhood is now located in the southeast quadrant of these crossroads was home to Camp Fuller, a Civil War training ground in the Fall and Winter of 1862.

We have streets in the neighborhoods that connect to these crossroads of North Main and Auburn which celebrate our military heritage and our veterans' contributions to our country. Perhaps you recognize these street names: Guard, Post, Camp, Sheridan, Ellsworth, Sherman, Custer, Grant, Hancock, Cumberland, Ellis, Logan, Douglas, Brown, and Ellsworth, named after Elmer Ellsworth, the first casualty of the Civil War, a former Rockford Resident, and good friend of President Lincoln. Ellsworth's death inspired thousands of men from across the nation to enlist in the Union cause.

I say these things today because when people walk or drive by these crossroads called North Main and Auburn Streets, they should know. The men, women, and children of this community, and those who visit this community, should know what a special place these crossroads are, and what a special place it is because of the men and women who came before us who transformed our community, and our country. It is in that spirit that we dedicate these crossroads of North Main and Auburn Streets as Veterans Memorial Circle--so that when people walk or drive by, they will take notice, they will feel a sense that this much be a special place, and they will remember this place with a sense of pride, and a place of honor.

Next year, we will be having another ceremony where we will be installing plaques along the wing walls that you see now installed at Veterans Memorial Circle, and it will celebrate the men and women who served our country in every major military conflict, and we will be specifically highlighting those men who received our nation's greatest honor, the Congressional Medal of Honor.

It seems so fitting that today, when we raise the garrison American flag for the first time in honor of our Veterans who served the cause of freedom, and we dedicate this place called Veterans Memorial Circle, we can look to the northeast quadrant of these crossroads, and we can see the statue of a Civil War soldier--beneath him the remains of an unknown Civil War soldier—behind him the buried bodies of the many souls who served our nation's Armed Forces. And we can see that this statue stands at attention, looking squarely at the American Flag flying in the middle of Veterans Memorial Circle, as a timeless tribute to every soldier.

God bless our veterans. God bless our community. And God bless our country.