How Different it Might Have Been

by Bill Sauers

The fall of 1953 was a rapidly changing time for the residents of the town of Greece. The Lake Ontario State Parkway was under construction and contractors had all they could do to build new homes for Greece’s growing population, as 100 people a month moved into the town. According to Ray Cole, the town’s building inspector at the time, 55 new home permits were issued in September alone. Then there was the Northgate Plaza grand opening, a three-day event that drew crowds of up to 75,000. A new shopping complex today would cause little excitement, but back then it was to be the very first suburban shopping center in Monroe County.

Meanwhile, in October, a small group of town citizens would affect the future of Greece. A grass roots group, the Shoremont Association, headed by Mario Berard of Edgemere Drive, was protesting the proposed construction of a factory at Dewey Avenue and Ling Road. It seemed that a 47-year old local company with 800 employees was rapidly outgrowing their plant on Hollenbeck Street and other sites scattered around the City of Rochester.

The company had acquired an option on the land and was seeking a zoning change to build their proposed “campus-type” research and production facility. The group of residents was afraid that a factory “would destroy the natural beauty of the lakeshore site, increase traffic, cause a smoke and industrial dirt nuisance and depreciate nearby property values and those of Greece as a whole.”

A Democrat & Chronicle editorial praised the residents for their opposition to changing the town’s zoning laws “that might allow the installation of a big factory in their neighborhood.” The editorial stated that “the company was one with a conscience and a sense of civic responsibility. Its officers were public spirited, and it could be taken for granted they would not willingly ruin a great public asset.” (Indeed, the president of the company had been mayor of the City only 20 years before). “The citizens were wise to move rapidly in trying to repulse an effort to change the zoning laws.” Because of the residents’ protest, the company pulled out of the deal and began the search for another site.

Were the right decisions made that first week in October of 1953? Certainly, it would have changed the character of the neighborhood and we now know the site that company had chosen would have been woefully inadequate. Would they have soon abandoned the site when they ran out of room, leaving another empty building, such as the old Odenbach ship building factory that was unoccupied for many years, or would they have continued to expand throughout the town of Greece? We will never know.

The Town of Greece certainly did prosper over the years without that factory, but so did the community that eagerly welcomed it. In 1954, Joseph C. Wilson, the president of the Haloid Co. announced his company’s plans for a new complex in the town of Webster. Several years later in 1961, the company changed its name to Xerox.

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