



Hinckley Historical Society News

2025, volume 5

Memories of Voss Motors

Submitted by Debbie Voss Mecklenburg and Lolly Voss

There are few reminders today of what was once the largest car dealership in Hinckley and for 56 years one of the most successful in the region for General Motors. The Voss family wanted to share their memories, photos, and reflections upon what made the business grow and flourish. In those early years, Hinckley could boast of four car dealerships representing Buick, Chevrolet, Chrysler, Dodge, Ford, Oldsmobile, and Plymouth. Their complete story is kept at the HHS museum.

The family's story begins in Kenosha County Wisconsin where Martin Voss was born into a Lutheran preacher's family. They moved to assignments in Wisconsin, Michigan and finally North Aurora,



Illinois. After college, Martin began selling all types of household products in the Aurora area and Chicago. On one of his train trips home from Chicago he met Ione Schmidt who was returning to Hinckley from nurse's training in Chicago. A relationship developed and they were married in Hinckley's Immanuel Lutheran Church in 1934.

The couple settled in Milwaukee where Martin's sales territory was based. In 1940, tired of all the traveling and after the birth of their second child, Martin and Ione decided to move to Hinckley. It was Ione's hometown and they could be closer to all the grandparents. Martin purchased a small Chevrolet dealership from Elmer Johnson at the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Maple Street. Johnson continued to

work for Martin until his retirement.

It was not the best time to start a car dealership as the auto industry shifted from making cars to vehicles for World War II. To support his growing family, Martin took a job with the war department in Chicago. He commuted to Chicago every day from the train station across the street from his new business. He began to build his dealership on evenings and weekends after he returned from his war-time job.



Once the war was over and cars and home appliances began to be available, Voss Motors also sold Frigidaire appliances, Motorola radios and Zenith TVs when they were introduced. Martin truly cared about each customer; he wanted to know about their families and offered advice, support and even

(continued on page 2)

(Voss, continued from page 1)

helped some with loans. The business grew rapidly after the war so he decided to add Oldsmobile to the dealership in 1950.

In addition to his core business in Hinckley and DeKalb County, Martin developed many customers in Aurora and the Chicago area. He would go to them to choose a car, pick up and deliver cars for service, and go to factories in Michigan to get just the car the customer wanted. The dealership grew to the point that Voss Motors contributed one third of the tax revenue for the Village of Hinckley.

In 1968, Martin and Ione's oldest son John and his wife, Lolly, returned to Hinckley to join the business. Both families volunteered, served on boards, and supported their church, schools, and community. Martin even helped form a group to attract industry to Hinckley.



In the 1970's, John agreed to buy the business from Martin and continued to grow it, doubling the car sales despite competition from Japanese cars that put many U.S. dealers out of business.

In 1980, Martin officially retired but regularly visited the dealership until his death in 1991. The business underwent a face lift in December 1990 and developed plans to someday build a new building to better serve customers. John, however, developed lung cancer and died in 1996. The business was sold to Tom Sparks who operated it until closing in 2007.



John, Lolly, Ione, and Martin were honored by General Motors for their 50 years of serving customers

Many employees got their start or spent their entire careers at Voss Motors. Well known were mechanics Lyle (Slim) Pettinger, and Jack Burnham, parts manager Wilber (Boots) Booth, office managers Virginia Heifner and then Jeryl Hintzsche, and salesman Ron Dillenback.



The Voss family thanks all past employees who contributed to the success of Voss Motors.

During the winter months of December to March, the museum will be open only by appointment. If you have visitors who would like to see the museum, or you have a question about Hinckley, or you need help researching your house or family tree, we are still available to help. Just call 815-761-4058 or send us an email at hinckleyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com.



History in Real Time

The Historical Society usually focuses on things that happened in the past. At our September annual meeting, however, we featured an ongoing story about the development and marketing of a product developed by a former resident to overcome infertility that has been called the “Innovation of 2024.” Dr. Jennifer Hintzsche Westphal returned to her hometown to share her personal story.

“My husband Ryan and I were ready to start our family in 2017,” Jennifer remembers, “when I was diagnosed with unexplained infertility.” It’s not an unusual diagnosis as statistics show one in five women have difficulty to conceive after a year of trying. Refusing to accept the diagnosis, Jennifer used her Ph.D. degree in biology to look for alternatives to the expensive procedure recommended by her doctor.

“The doctors told me I wouldn’t be a mother. I used my Ph.D. to prove them wrong.” Jennifer Hintzsche, PherDal founder and CEO.

“I found a non-invasive solution that had the same live birth rate in trials as the recommended clinical treatment,” she said. “I went into problem-solving mode and used my bioinformatics education to build my own intracervical insemination kit.” In the second month of using it, she conceived her first child.



One day, burnt out from her career in the health-tech sector, Jennifer said she and her husband decided to form a company and market their product. They were told it would take a million dollars to conduct the research trials necessary for FDA (federal Food and Drug Administration) approval.

“We didn’t have access to that kind of resources so we turned to online crowd-funding equity where people could buy shares of our company to own it and help fund it through the FDA,” she said. “I’m so thankful to the Hinckley community and others who bought shares in our company so we could conduct the trials.”

In December 2023, the same kit Hintzsche used to conceive her two children was FDA-cleared under the brand name PherDal, the company Hintzsche founded and where she now serves as CEO. Almost a year later, the product was named one of “The Best Inventions of 2024” by TIME. As news of PherDal expands, Jennifer said her website is flooded with requests for the product and pictures of the children her process helped to create.

Jennifer continues to be recognized for her business skills, marketing efforts, and tech savvy. She recently spoke at a Conference about women using ‘spite tracking’ diagnostic tools to validate their health concerns for their healthcare professionals.

This HBR graduate appears primed to continue making history on her mission to make reproductive healthcare more inclusive, cost effective, and accessible.

Other Annual Meeting News

HHS Financial Report

Treasurer Barry Morsch gave an overview of the finances of the Historical Society during the annual meeting. The Society’s museum, programs, and operations are made possible from membership dues, donations and grants. The HHS Endowment fund has been created at the DeKalb County Community Foundation to provide funding for special projects beyond normal operations. Donations honoring six families have been received to date. Contact HHS if you would like to honor or remember someone with an endowment donation.

Here are the financial details:

2024 Receipts		2024 Expenses	
Memberships	\$ 1,934	Dues and Fees	\$ 152
General Donations	\$11,087	Office & Supplies	\$ 1,366
Donations for HHS Endowment	\$27,500	Utilities	\$ 2,020
Grants	\$ 5,000	Insurance	\$ 2,692
Merchandise Sales	\$ 110	Building Repairs	\$ 1,441
Programs	\$ 1,500	Museum Displays	\$ 1,125
Bank Interest	\$ 57	Programs	\$ 6,546
Total	\$ 47,188	Transfer to Endowment	\$27,500
		Total	\$ 42,842
	12/31 Bank Balance		\$58,662
	12/31 HHS Endowment Balance		\$68,000

Directors Elected

The Historical Society board of directors is responsible for pursuing our mission of preserving the past of the Hinckley area for future generations. This includes preserving artifacts, guiding the activities of our Society, and operating the museum. Members of our 9-member board serve 3-year terms and two positions were up for election this year. Reelected were:

Jennifer Klambauer, is a life-long, active member of the community. Several years ago she was one of five individuals who spent countless hours creating the mosaic mural on Sycamore Street. She has experience in teaching, operating a preschool, and accounting and is employed as Village of Hinckley Deputy Clerk. Jennifer currently serves as Historical Society Secretary and has been the chair of the Cemetery Walk program.



(continued on page 5_

(Annual, continued from page 4)



Shawn McCrea is another Hinckley native who is a product of the school system and believes strongly in a good foundation for learning. When she married Mike McCrea, they settled in a house on South View Street where they have raised their family and lived for over 40 years. Shawn holds an early childhood education license and currently owns the Building Block Preschool which she operates with her daughter.

Reviewing Society Activities

During the annual meeting Bob Pritchard, society president, lead a discussion about the organization’s various activities. He reported there are now over 100 society members and an additional 158 people are on our mailing lists.

- * Collecting oral histories. With the involvement of HBR social studies students, another 5 video interviews and transcriptions of the stories of current and former residents were added to our collection. The stories of 36 people are now available.
- * Sponsoring three summer band concerts. Grants were received to continue providing band concerts to bring the community together for music enjoyment. Approximately 80 people of all ages attended each concert.
- * Arranging three musical performances for the Public Library Summer Reading Program.
- * Publishing five society newsletters. Since newspapers rarely cover our town, newsletters serve to record our history.
- * Collecting museum items. Several thousand artifacts have been and are continuing to be collected. Currently the museum features items from 20 decades of Hinckley. Volunteers are needed to keep the museum open.
- * Welcoming third grade class visitors. Introduced about 80 students to local history with a scavenger hunt.
- * Walking in another cemetery. Members told the stories of five residents of the Immanuel Lutheran Cemetery. This was the fourth year for our walk.
- * The Historical Society plays an important role in the community to provide an attraction for visitors, help families remember their roots, and discover the stories of their house. Contact us for assistance.

Board Members:

President - Bob Pritchard

Vice Pres. – Cathy Bartels

Secretary – Jennifer Klambauer

Treasurer – Barry Morsch

Other members –Shawn McCrea, Rebecca Nickels, Stephanie Shelton, Ardith Trumpy, and Jay Yaggie

Newsletter published by Bob and Mary Pritchard

Tales the Tombstones Tell

On a beautiful October day, the Historical Society held its fourth cemetery walk by the Immanuel Lutheran Church on Lee Road. Cemetery Trustee Lee Madsen shared that the 3-acre cemetery has been enlarged three times since it was first dedicated in 1889. Within the confines today are over 575 residents who were some of Hinckley's earliest and successful residents. Giving tributes to some of those residents were HHS members Jeff Wielert, Berny Fitzpatrick, Sally and Jim Thomson, and Bob Pritchard. The Walk was organized by Jennifer Klambauer.

Jeff related how **Christian and Flora Hartmann** left their German homeland in 1854 for better opportunities in America. They finally settled on land northwest of what is now Hinckley with just 80 dollars in hand, three children, and hearts full of hope. With their success, they donated land for the Immanuel Lutheran Church in 1868 and the cemetery in 1889.



A great granddaughter of the Hartmanns married Martin Voss who was another of the featured stories. Berny told how **Martin Voss** started his career as a traveling salesman selling everything from radios to laundry detergents. In 1940 he bought the General Motors dealership in Hinckley and used his sales skills to build a successful business that he turned over to his son in 1980.

Sally told about **Bessie Burmester's** life which exemplified innovation, hard work, and community spirit for over 94 years. Bessie ran the Burmester Electric Company appliance shop with her husband even after his death in 1936. She worked at several companies and was bookkeeper for a local veterinary clinic. When dial telephones came to Hinckley she ran Hinckley's answering service. Bessie managed the Dairy Joy Drive-in with her son, Red, and served customers until 1968. She still had time to be active in church and volunteer for the St. Paul's church woman's guild.



The life of another area resident who served his country was told by Bob. He described **Dallas Waldschmidt** as a farm boy who loved to raise Polland China hogs, play in the band, and compete in every high school sport. After serving in the Marine Corps, Dallas farmed with Nancy and was active in the community. His life was cut short at the age of 31 when he was killed in a farm accident.

The school created an award in Dallas' memory to honor excellence in the classroom and on the athletic field. The family also donated a cemetery

(continued on page 7)

(Tales, continued from page 6)

memorial honoring Dallas as well as all who served to preserve our freedoms. It is the site of the Immanuel Lutheran Church Memorial Day services each year.



Jim told about the life of **Private Ernest Ilseman**, son of William Ilseman, who died while serving his country during World War I. Ernest enlisted in the Army Infantry and shipped out to France in 1918 because he wanted to stand for something bigger than himself. While fighting, the 19-year-old became a victim of poisonous gas.

May all these souls rest in peace.

HBR Soccer

HBR High School Boys Soccer team wins Little Ten Tournament

In what is described as one of the best matchups of the season, second seeded HBR defeated top seeded Somonauk/Leland/Newark 2 to 1 for the Little Ten Conference Tournament title on October 10. HBR, now 16-3-2 for the season, claimed its first conference title win since 2016.



Middle School Soccer Team claims Junior Ten Tournament Title for third year in a row.





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Phone: 815-761-4058

- * Museum is open only by appointment during this winter
- * Share your ideas to celebrate the 250th anniversary
- * Thank you for your support this year.



Preparing for a Celebration



Our country will be commemorating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence next year. It's an excellent time for our museum to join with others to listen to people, look at how this document has been implemented in our space, and share our hopes for the future.

We will feature the answers of HBR eighth graders in 1976 to the question "what America means to me?" We will ask today's youth and adults "what truths are self-evident today?" We will update our History of Hinckley document for the last 50 years.

Plan to join in the activities. A six-part documentary series created by producer Ken Burns will get you in the spirit as it airs on PBS TV beginning on November 16., 2025 It explores the country's founding struggle and eight-year war for independence.

AMERICA

