

OH, OAK BROOK!

Why everyone naturally loves the village Paul Butler created

BY LARRY ATSEFF

Thanks to the vision of Paul Butler, the little village of Oak Brook, (population just over 8,000 residents) is so well thought out, that you really don't have to go anywhere else.

In fact, the world of polo has come to Oak Brook for years, attracting the best teams. The world's best golfers came to Butler National for 17 years for the Western Open. And Oakbrook Center is still regarded as one of the finest shopping malls in Chicagoland.

And, right now, life-size reproductions of the works of Michaelangelo from the Sistine Chapel are on display at the former Sears store in the mall. Even if you have been to Vatican City to see the work, you have a much closer, better view than looking up at the ceiling in Italy.

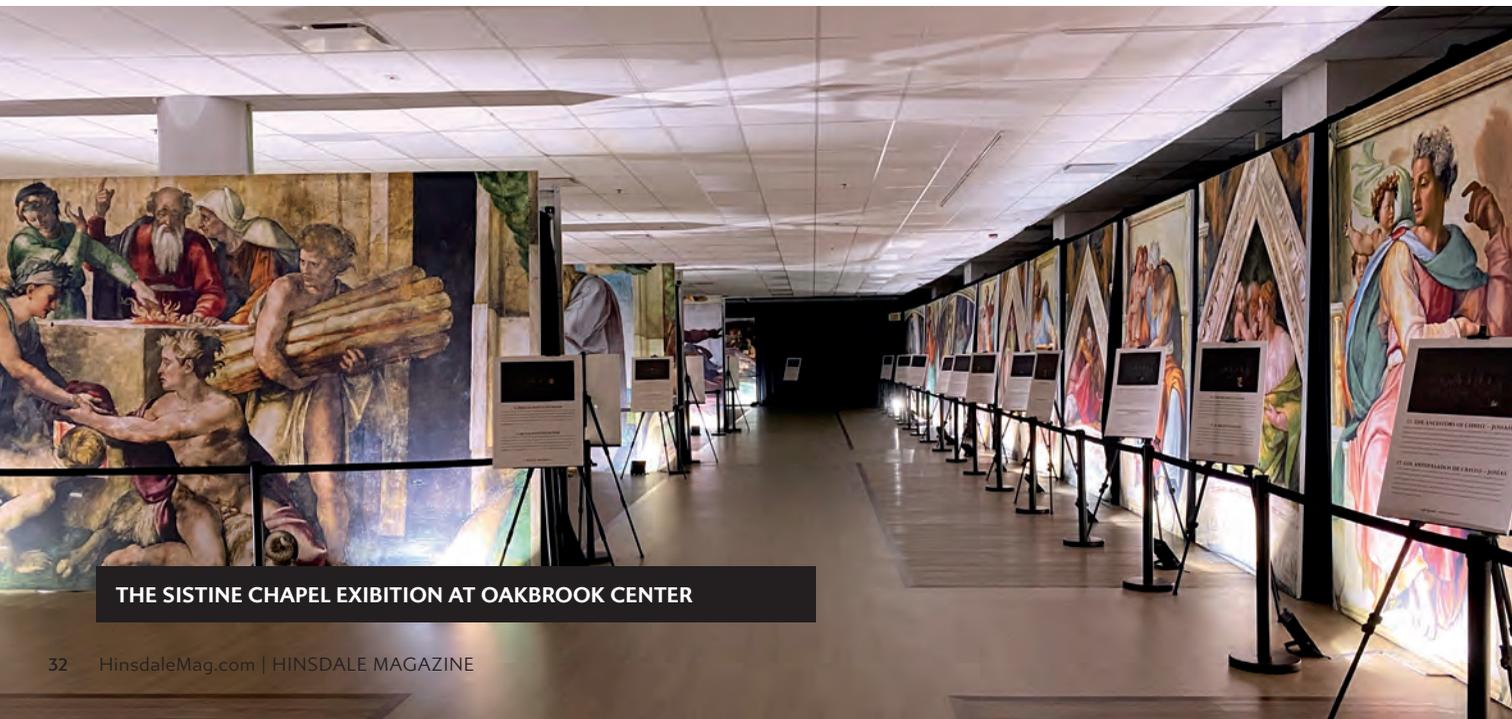
There are 34 large-scale reproductions and dozens of other scenes in actual size that enable you to appreciate the genius, imagination and talent of Michaelangelo. You also appreciate the immense effort...it took him

from 1508 to 1512 to complete the works.

You can actually see the brush strokes as he brought so many famous scenes from the Bible to life.

"We get at the stories he was trying to tell," said Dakota Laurin, manager of business development for SBX Group, which has partnered with Los Angeles-based SEE Global Entertainment to tour the exhibit.

You walk through at your leisure and you can take as many pictures as you want. Each scene



THE SISTINE CHAPEL EXHIBITION AT OAKBROOK CENTER



THE
DRAKE
OAK BROOK

AUTOGRAPH COLLECTION®
HOTELS



ESCAPE FROM THE ORDINARY

RENOVATED GUEST ROOMS | CEREMONY & RECEPTION SPACE
SUNDAY BRUNCH | LIVE ENTERTAINMENT | HIGH TEA

2301 York Road, Oak Brook, IL 60523 | (630) 571-0000 | thedrakeoakbrook.com | [f](#) [i](#) [@thedrakeoakbrook](#)

has an explainer card and diagram showing where it is actually located in the Chapel. The exhibit is open through August 15, and comes complete with educational materials about Michaelangelo himself, his life and times.

Of course, there is so much more about Oak Brook to like. There are housing developments with expansive lots and beautiful homes with streets winding through just as nature created the land...just as Butler thought it should be.

You can also work in Oak Brook minutes away from your home, thanks to Butler's foresight in planning low-rise office complexes,

set apart from the homes. No factories.

Again, thanks to Butler, there is the sports core, complete with bath and tennis club, public Oak Brook Golf Club, private Butler National golf club, and polo fields with a complete season in swing through September. He also made sure there were public parks throughout the village as well.

Oakbrook Center is home to over 170 stores, including the most complete collection of upscale retailers you will find anywhere. This includes some of the finest restaurants in the area. And, in and around Oakbrook Center, there

are additional smaller malls with still more stores and restaurants. There is a quite a selection of fine hotels for visitors, conventions, business meetings and celebrations of weddings and anniversaries.

Last, but not least, there is live entertainment just minutes away at Drury Lane, which is resuming its long famous run of great Broadway plays and musicals this fall, as well as fine dining.

Not only is all of this completely planned out for everyone's pleasure, the sales taxes collected mean no property taxes for Oak Brook's residents. ■



THE SISTINE CHAPEL CEILING

THE CREATION OF ADAM IS A FRESCO PAINTING BY ITALIAN ARTIST MICHELANGELO, WHICH FORMS PART OF THE SISTINE CHAPEL'S CEILING, PAINTED C. 1508-1512. IT ILLUSTRATES THE BIBLICAL CREATION NARRATIVE FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS IN WHICH GOD GIVES LIFE TO ADAM, THE FIRST MAN.



Lou Malnati's[®]
PIZZERIA

NOW OPEN

DAKBROOK TERRACE

18W080 22ND ST * 630-912-8300

WESTERN SPRINGS

4700 GILBERT AVE * 708-246-3400



THE
PASSION RUNS DEEP

ORDER ONLINE * LOUMALNATIS.COM



Colors Your Way USA
Painting & Remodeling

**HANDYMAN
SERVICES**

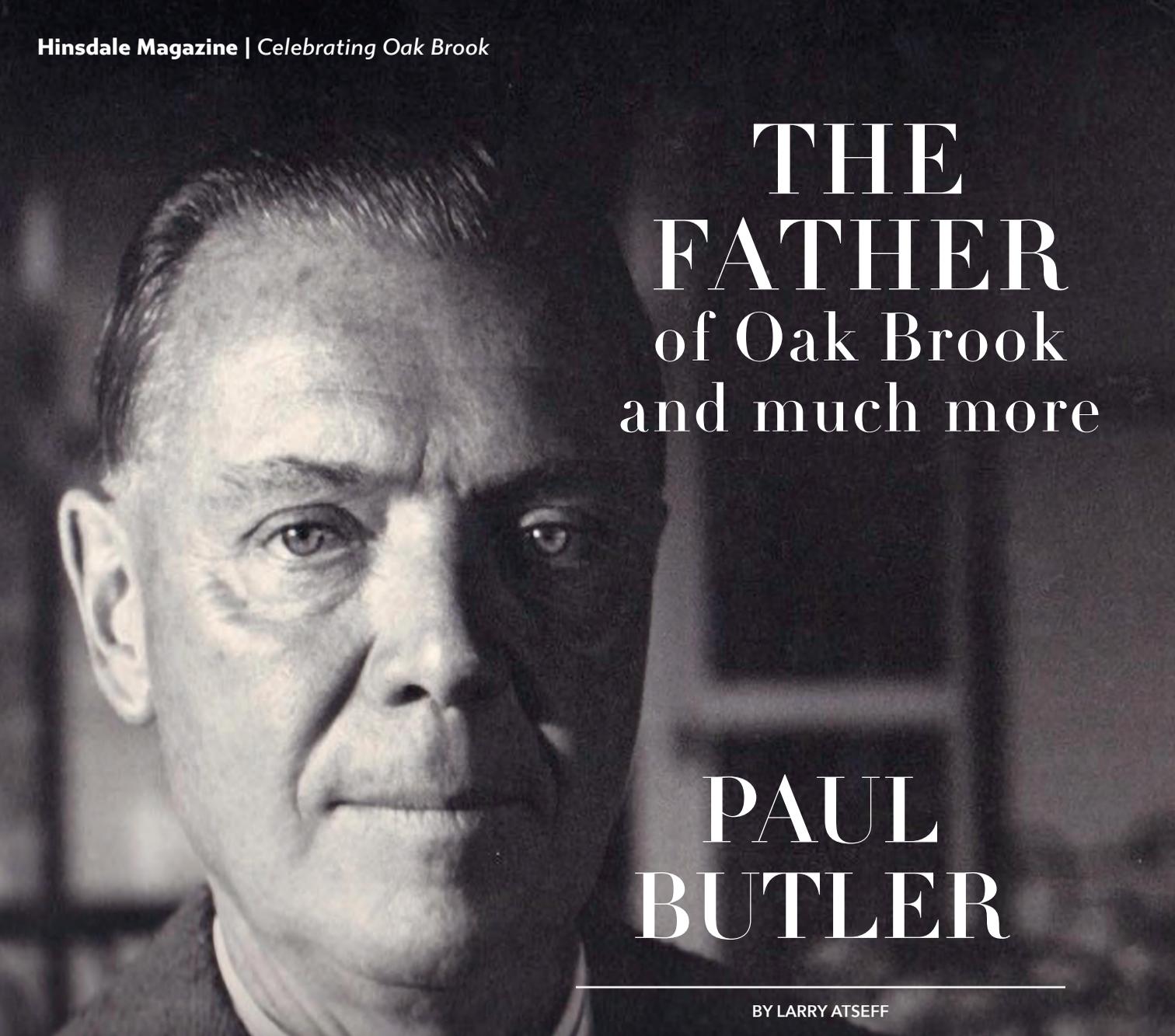
OVER 25yrs Experience

- * Drywall & Plaster Repair *
- * Floor & Wall Tile *
- * Painting *
- * Interior & Exterior *
- * Power Washing *
- * Remodeling *
- * Wood Finishing, Replacement & Staining

Michael Walsh
President



630-229-2962
Bridgeview, IL



THE FATHER of Oak Brook and much more

PAUL BUTLER

BY LARRY ATSEFF

Once upon a time, spanning much of the 20th century, a true visionary came on the scene in what is now the Village of Oak Brook. Paul Butler was the Father of Oak Brook—but he accomplished a whole lot more. What follows is a reminder of some of what he did, and *how he did it all*.

Karen Bushy, the last president of Oak Brook to know and spend time with Butler, has contributed many of the observations in this piece. Bushy was a person that Butler trusted during the years when his ideas were being translated into reality, as the dream began to be implemented on the scale he had imagined. Bushy met Butler

shortly after moving to Oak Brook in 1973. They became good friends and remained so for the rest of Butler's life.

The Butler Paper Company

Before there was a Paul Butler, there was the Butler Paper Company. Butler's grandfather Julius Wales Butler and great uncle Oliver Morris Butler founded the J.W. Butler Paper Co. in the 1800s in the Chicago area. It grew to become one of the largest family-owned paper companies in the country until Paul Butler sold it in 1960. Nevertheless, Butler Paper was the foundation that enabled Butler to add companies and follow pursuits in a number of eclectic directions.

Paul Butler arrives on the scene

Tom and Mary Sterling, authors of *Hinsdale & the World*, relate that Butler was born on June 23, 1892 to Frank and Fannie Butler of Hinsdale, owners of the Butler Paper Co.

“When Paul and his brother, Julius, were still children, their father bought land on the west bank of Salt Creek as the site for their future home,” the Sterlings write. “The tall oaks surrounding the area together with the babbling brook gave it the name later shared with an entire village—Oak Brook. Frank Butler's Oak Brook was a farmhouse like any other, consisting of a house, stables, and fields. When Frank bought nearby Natoma

Dairy from George Robbins, son of Hinsdale's founder William Robbins, he acquired Natoma's lucrative dairy operation along with its fine herd of prize-winning dairy cows. The name Natoma, by the way, comes from the Indian word meaning 'running water,' no doubt a reference to Salt Creek. When Paul eventually acquired Natoma Farm from his father, he used it as headquarters for both the Butler Co. and his sports core, as he began systematically to develop the area."

The influence of polo and horsemanship

According to a biography by the Oak Brook Polo Club, Butler attended the University of Illinois from 1910 to 1911, where he studied agriculture. He also served as a lieutenant in the 106th cavalry, which was known as the Black Horse Troop during the First World War. He also became a captain and a pilot during the war. After serving, he also spent time on Butler ranches in the Dakota territory and oversaw Montana ranches in the 1940s.

"The game of polo captured the heart of Paul Butler, whose enthusiasm for the game would shape the evolution of a village," the Sterlings say. "As a member of the Wheaton polo team, in 1915, young Paul Butler helped lead his team to victory over a team from Onwentsia. His love for the game led to the creation of the Oak Brook Polo Club, and, in 1929, organizers put him in charge of setting up polo matches for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair, which hoped to feature 'games of every sport from archery to polo...with the greatest athletes from all nations competing.'"

When he played actively, he won six U.S. Open Polo Championships and four Butler Handicap titles, according to the biography.

Polo provided the Village of Oak Brook a lifestyle appeal—a social sporting scene, attracting people from across the country and polo teams from around the world. In many ways, polo created what became Oak Brook. The Oak Brook Polo Club was the largest polo plant in the world from 1954 to 1979, and would be billed the "polo



A RECENT MATCH AT OAK BROOK POLO CLUB, 700 OAK BROOK ROAD

capital of the United States," or "polo town." Not only did the club host polo every week during the season, but it also "rode to the hounds" in full regalia with regularity.

By 1956, the Oak Brook Polo Club had 14 polo fields and stabling for 400



horses, with games, played six days a week during the season. The club also included grandstands, bleachers and box seats, a clubhouse, and 36 miles of tree-lined trails. Butler joined the two polo fields closest to Oak Brook Road (31st Street) and York Road so they could be used as an airstrip for incoming guests. Those guests included royalty, dignitaries, celebrities, and professional golfers, who loved playing at Butler National Golf Club.

Over the years, Prince Charles, Lord Cowdray, Maj. Ronald Ferguson, Lord

Patrick Beresford, King Hussein, the Maharaja and Maharani of Jaipur, Audrey Hepburn, Vivien Leigh, and others visited the club. Mick Jagger was a frequent guest, as was Susan St. James. Butler's Oak Brook team also traveled far and wide to support other clubs, and Oak Brook hosted international teams from Argentina, Mexico, England, and India.

Butler's approach to business and Oak Brook

As noted, Karen Bushy moved into the village in 1973 and got to know Butler and his family as neighbors.

What follows are her recollections about how Paul Butler worked with neighbors and others who could help him realize the dream of a special Oak Brook and other successes.

She says, "If you lived in Oak Brook, Butler considered you a 'neighbor'. His friend and then village president George Howell had named Bushy to the plan commission, and Butler loved the idea that young people moving into the village were eager to catch his vision for what this could become. He gladly shared with those who cared to participate in what he called his 'grand experiment'."

Continued on next page



CRATE & BARREL AT OAKBROOK CENTER

Continued from the previous page

“For Paul, it just made straightforward, practical sense to him to work where he lived,” Bushy said. “His polo operations were right nearby. He loved the surroundings—the trees, the water, and the earth itself—the reason the Oak Brook Polo Club colors were blue and green with a bit of brown accent. Here he could meet with his nearby friends, farmers, and landowners. One of the low-slung, rather unremarkable buildings that were part of the old dairy operation was actually the general headquarters for all of the far-flung Butler enterprises and interests. Known locally as ‘the GHQ,’ it was where Paul and others had their office—offices that were very, very casual: blue jeans and boots—never suits and ties, to be sure.”

Bushy said the GHQ contained a conference room that Butler called the “chart room.” One whole wall was covered with an aerial photograph of the Butler landholdings in the area, allowing Paul and those there to do business with him a chance to really appreciate the “big picture.” Two of the people there helped keep Paul “on track,” secretary Ann Spurrier, and his “houseman” Kenyon.

“His larger vision beyond polo and riding to hounds was to develop more activities at the sports core,” Bushy said. “He had the land and thought it could be turned into a world-class golf

course. And so in 1972, Butler National Golf Club was created.”

Butler National hosted the Western Open from 1974 to 1990, and in May 2007, Golf Digest rated Butler No. 21 on its list of “America’s 100 Greatest Courses.”

She recalls, “In the same compound as the GHQ, folks from Oak Brook and others who knew it was there enjoyed one of the best restaurants around: The Oak Brook Saddle Club. Known for its ‘best available steaks’, and even more for the neighborly camaraderie, Friday and Saturday nights you could always find friends and neighbors enjoying drinks and dinner at the Saddle Club, an atmosphere that grew over time, to be sure. You just had to know where to

turn off on to the gravel road that led deep into the woods.”

Elsewhere on the “sports core” property, Butler had built the Oak Brook Bath & Tennis Club, a membership-only place for summer rest and relaxation and a lovely amenity to the polo operations, along with a small nine-hole executive golf course he’d built on the property. It became the site for the Sunday afternoon parties after the conclusion of the last polo game of the day.

Bushy said Butler “almost always” enjoyed a good relationship with local residents.

“As they saw how he was developing the area, they looked to him when they



PAUL BUTLER'S OAK BROOK HOME

wanted to sell their farmland,” she said. “Eventually, Butler Co. owned 3,600 acres in the area, simply by offering to buy their land when they wanted to sell. He interacted frequently with the neighbors, who had formed the Oak Brook Civic Association.”

An important quality about Butler that Bushy noted was his willingness to change his mind when he realized he made a mistake. For example, as companies moved their headquarters out to Oak Brook, he was adamant that the buildings be only one or two stories, square, boxy and white. After a few went up, he admitted it was a “terrible idea”.

Polo activities and ranch holdings took Butler all over the country. That’s where his training as a pilot came in handy, enabling him to fly to often remote locations. Ever curious and observant, Butler noted that all these small airports had the same needs in terms of equipment, fuel, buildings and hangars, and so Butler Aviation was born.

In 1986, Paul sold Butler Aviation to North American Ventures for \$140 million in cash and stock. The company, based in Montvale, N.J., grew to provide technical and management services to airports, marine, energy, electronics and telecommunications, employing 10,000 people with estimated revenues of \$400 million.

By the time Bushy got to know Butler in the ‘70s, he had developed three major subdivisions in the village: Ginger Creek, York Woods, and Brook Forest. Butler never wanted to build the homes; instead, his focus was on the land and keeping everything as natural as possible.

Starting with so much raw land, much of it wooded and rolling, Butler was able to implement his vision

on a grand scale. Lot sizes would be substantial. Homes would be set back from the roadway and generous separation between the homes was expected, for both privacy and beauty. He wanted the land to be left just as nature created it. There would be no leveling of hills and dales, no

with several experts to complete a comprehensive plan for Oak Brook. The idea was to work out a plan for a well-organized commercial area that would support the homes and recreational areas. His vision was a village of no more than 10,000 residents.

“The beauty of the open fields, the magnificent stands of old-growth oak forests, were to be preserved for the future, so he worked with George Howell, and they crafted an agreement to sell the sports core to the people of Oak Brook, provided the land would ‘in perpetuity be green space, owned by and for the benefit of the people of the Village of Oak Brook.’ That preserved another 270 acres in the center of the village.”

— KAREN BUSHY, former President of Oak Brook

straight roads and streets. Instead, there would be winding roads and paths, following the natural contours of the land. The residents who would become the decision-makers for the village understood his goals and his vision, and they were the ones who implemented those ideas and codified them into what became known as the subdivision control ordinance that governed all aspects of development in Oak Brook.

“His eager collaboration with those who lived here and who were willing to devote their time to giving life to his dreams made for a beautiful, forward-looking village,” Bushy said.

Concerned with the encroachment of the suburbs, Butler also consulted

In the same vein, Butler wanted to make sure that there would be plenty of natural land settings throughout Oak Brook. He donated the land that would become a large tract of forest preserve, which adjoins Fullersburg Woods to the south in Hinsdale. The side of the preserve facing 31st Street has been named Paul Butler Nature Area.

Butler also donated land for what would become Christ Church of Oak Brook. He hoped for a large church that would welcome all who came to Oak Brook. He thought that more appropriate than several small denominational churches. In the years when the Western Open was hosted in the village and international polo was being played throughout the summer, another of his

ideas manifested: golfers, broadcasters, polo players, and fans alike all found a place to worship in town, alongside the “local folks.”

Butler further donated land for schools, and was involved with his father and uncle in building both the first and second Butler School. The original school at Spring Road and 31st Street is now the home of the Oak Brook Historical Society.

“Paul did not want there to ever be development on his beloved sports core,” Bushy said. “The beauty of the open fields, the magnificent stands of old-growth oak forests, were to be preserved for the future, so he worked with George Howell, and they crafted

Continued on next page

Continued from the previous page

an agreement to sell the sports core to the people of Oak Brook, provided the land would 'in perpetuity be green space, owned by and for the benefit of the people of the Village of Oak Brook.' That preserved another 270 acres in the center of the village."

"Part of Butler's vision was attracting businesses to the area to create a tax base. The fanfare of sporting activities was a natural springboard for contacts for bringing business headquarters out to Oak Brook. Companies were quick to recognize the ingenuity of Butler's plan, which meant that property owners in the village, both residential and commercial, would pay no property taxes to operate the village. All of the revenues needed to sustain operations came from sales tax-producing commercial enterprises, which the business community greatly appreciated. All of this made Oak Brook even more attractive for companies to relocate."

"As residential and commercial development evolved, Oak Brook was incorporated in 1958, and in the early 1960s, Oakbrook Center was developed into as a very desirable upscale shopping mall."

Paul Butler's children

Paul had four children: Michael, Jorie, Frank, and Norman. Michael and Jorie followed in their father's footsteps in their own way.

As you might expect, with all of his contacts with notables through Polo and his many pursuits, Paul found time and interest to back a number of successful Broadway shows including *Kismet*, *Peter Pan*, and *The Music Man*. Paul's son Michael followed his father by promoting the sport of polo, volunteering his talents to the US Polo Association, and supported the arts. In fact, Michael became an American theatrical producer best known for bringing the rock musical *Hair* from the public theater to Broadway in 1968.

His daughter Jorie, became an excellent rider and polo player herself and was rated by the US Polo Association in 1969. She organized the USPA Polo Pony Championship and helped establish its rules and registry. She served on the board of directors for the National Polo Museum and the Hall of Fame selection committee.

Jorie also developed the Hunter Trails subdivision.

In 1971, she married Geoffrey Kent. He too was a polo player, and with him, she helped build a very successful travel business specializing in luxury photography safaris all over the world.

Like her dad, she is also very committed to conservation efforts.

Last Observations

One of Paul Butler's many passions was photography. Each year, he would select a photograph he'd taken, and have it made into a Christmas card that was sent to every home in the village. Sharing what he loved about nature and Oak Brook was important to him, and he hoped others would enjoy it and appreciate it as much as he did. In a terrible irony, on June 21, 1981, he was standing in the middle of Oak Brook Road, right in front of his old homestead, taking photographs of the sunset, when he was struck by a car and killed.

Almost 40 years have passed since that date—enough time to see how many of his innovative ideas have become the accepted standard in so many of the areas he influenced.

"Paul Butler was a true visionary, a true Renaissance man," Bushy said, "not only the Father of Oak Brook, but even more than you ever imagined." ■



Live Life Artfully

Live it here drurydesigns.com



Kitchen & Bath Studio

CLIENT FOCUSED DESIGN™ SINCE 1987.
GLEN ELLYN, ILLINOIS 630.469.4980

How Oak Brook Grew From 1958 to 2008

EXCERPTS FROM HISTORICAL TIMELINE PROVIDED BY WILLIAM WATSON 2008

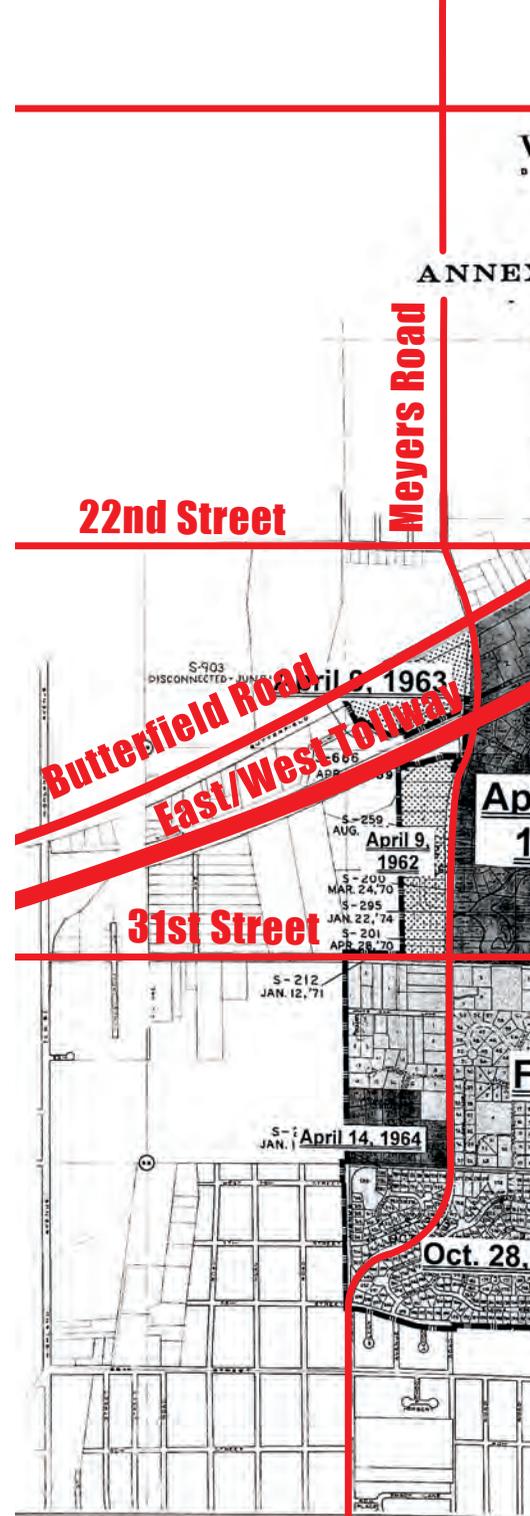
In the 1940's as Paul Butler took over management of the Butler Company, he continued to purchase land so that eventually the company owned approximately 3600 acres of what is now Oak Brook. In 1942 a community wide organization called "The Oak Brook Civic Association" was created to serve the area between Hinsdale and Elmhurst as a World War II civil defense operation. It marked the first time that the words 'Oak Brook' were used to identify anything other than polo. In 1945 following World War II, the Oak Brook Civic Association was incorporated as a "not for profit corporation". It flourished as a "quasi-governmental" organization that held monthly meetings at the Butler School.

In 1946-47 Theodore "Ted" Mohlman was hired by Paul Butler as General Manager of the Oak Brook division of the Butler Company. He became responsible

for the polo operation, 'The Base Farm', York Golf Course, and Upland Game Hunting facility. In 1951, Butler convinced the Illinois State Tollway Commission authorities to move the Tri-State road east to the DuPage-Cook County line, and re-locate the East-West road north to the 22nd Street corridor.

In 1955 Marshall Field & Company purchased the vacant 150-acre Otto Ahren's farm located at Route 83 and 22nd street for a future store and what became known as Oakbrook Center.

The original village of Oak Brook became a reality on February 21, 1958 when it consisted of one square mile and had only 103 residents. It is framed on the map in dark lines. Because the proposed shopping center was not contiguous to the village, it was not included on the petition. In turn, Paul Butler and Ted Mohlman convinced several residents of Utopia (subsequently



renamed Oakbrook Terrace) to disconnect themselves from Utopia and were annexed into Oak Brook. They brought with them the vacant land on which the shopping center would be built.

In April 1958, Ted Mohlman was elected first president of the Village of Oak Brook. During 1958 and 1959, Paul Butler annexed all of his property into the new Village.

OAKBROOK CENTER

a Gem in the Midwest

BY CHUCK FIELDMAN



As senior general manager of Oakbrook Center, Tim Geiges is the onsite person who steers the ship of one of the most successful shopping centers in the United States.



TIM GEIGES

Geiges, who enjoys outdoor activities such as running, swimming and golf, grew up outside of Cleveland, Ohio, and made a stop in Northwest Indiana, before settling in the Chicago suburbs in 2005. His resume in shopping center management includes a five-year run, which ended in 2015, at Old Orchard in Skokie, which initially was built by the same developer as was Oakbrook Center.

Geiges said he was aware of Oakbrook Center long before becoming its senior general manager in 2018.

“Oakbrook Center is well located in the western suburbs, with great

access,” he said. “Oak Brook has allowed the property to recreate itself over and over. I’m proud to work for (Oakbrook Center owner) Brookfield Properties, which continues to reinvest. I enjoy coming to work everyday and always trying to make the property better.”

Oakbrook Center opened in March 1962, according to information from Brookfield Properties. Key tenants at that time were Marshall Field’s, which became Macy’s in 2006; Sears, Bonwit Teller and Jewel Tea Co. Many businesses have come and gone over the nearly 60 years of operation, and that still is the case.

Geiges said new businesses continue to open, mentioning the newly-built Restoration Hardware Gallery and its Sept. 24 debut, with three levels, 60,000 square feet and a glass-encased rooftop restaurant and wine bar as a new addition.

Slated for October openings were Allbirds, a New-Zealand-American company that designs and sells footwear and apparel; and Gucci, an Italian luxury fashion house based in Florence, Italy, which includes handbags, footwear, accessories, makeup, fragrances and home decoration among its offerings.

A fall opening also was targeted for Puttshack, a U.K.-based mini-golf gaming restaurant going into part of the former Lord & Taylor site, which

will have four mini-golf courses, food, drinks and private event space.

“Puttshack is exciting; it looks like a fun place,” Geiges said.

He said the transformation of the former Lord & Taylor space into multiple new businesses isn’t untypical of what is expected in the future.

“We’re always looking at trends, and converting big box stores to multi-use retail is definitely something that is happening now and will continue,”

Geiges said. “I can’t even picture Lord & Taylor there anymore.”

Geiges said the retail future of Oakbrook Center is likely to include some of the ever increasing businesses that began as online only, but now are looking to open brick and mortar options. An example is online giant Amazon, which opened an Amazon 4-Star Store in November 2019 in part of the former Sears space.

While providing an impressive shopping experience and a plethora of restaurants to visitors, along with entertainment and events, Oakbrook Center plays a huge role in continuing to allow the village to be among the relatively few municipalities in Illinois to not levy a property tax, as mall businesses contribute a significant portion of sales tax revenue collected by Oak Brook.





Collections of sales tax from Oakbrook Center businesses account for about 50% of the village's annual total, said Oak Brook Finance Director Jason Paprocki.

But the importance of Oakbrook Center to the village doesn't end with those tax dollars, said Village President Gopal Lalimalani.

"The mall is the brand of Oak Brook," he said. "People come to visit Oak Brook, in part because of the mall. We don't have a downtown or a train station, and I think our our downtown is really the mall. They do many things there and always are doing something to make the place more attractive."

Geiges said that the retail component of Oakbrook Center, while obviously at the forefront of operations, doesn't account for everything that takes place.

"We see people spend a lot of time here; we give them a reason to come here for a lot of reasons," Geiges said.

Events such as free Wednesday night family movies during the summer on a big screen in the village green area, an art festival and a Father's Day Classic Car Show, expected to return in 2022 after being canceled for two years, have been popular happenings and have brought people out from Oak Brook and well beyond. Oakbrook

Center also previously hosted the Christkindlmarket and the Adventure to Santa holiday event.

"This is more than a traditional

"I think free parking and less sales tax are an attraction. It takes once to come out and see what we have to offer and then want to come back."

- TIM GEIGES,
senior general manager of Oakbrook Center

shopping center," Geiges said. Retail's always going to be a critical piece, but there's so much more than retail." Geiges said an important goal at Oakbrook center is to create

experiences that bring the community together.

"The Wednesday night movies (this year) were great because people were really trying to get back to some sort of normalcy after so many things being shut down a year ago (because of COVID-19)," he said.

While excited about the new businesses opening in Oakbrook Center, and the variety included, Geiges said he believes the future of Oakbrook center looks bright.

"I saw a lot of new customers las year from the south suburbs and the city," he said. "I think free parking and less sales tax are an attraction. It takes once to come out and see what we have to offer and then want to come back." ■

