

Helenius Family Home Celebrates 100 Years

BY: JULIE MAKAROWSKY, IBACH CIO

In a newer subdivision, where there's a garden nursery, an industrial park, a road with traffic concerns, an award winning park in one direction and a 22 mile Ice Age Tonquin Trail coming along in the other direction, another find awaits to be uncovered.

It's the pride and stored memories of a home with a 100 year family history sitting right in the middle of this land. A home with stories spanning our lifetimes, of a family settling in Tualatin from Keuruu, Finland at the turn of the last century and the significance a piece of history like this can point to good citizenship.

The home is of Oscar M. Helenius and the story is his contribution to a community.

As a young teenager Oscar did not get along with his father, so he decided a better life waited for him by running away to join a sailing ship. Setting out to sea as the cabin boy he ventured all around the world into his early 30's, sooner rather than later becoming first mate of the ship. His journeys brought him to the Oregon coast where he met his wife to be, Olga. With hard times bared, the two purchased 10 acres and settled outside of what would soon become our newly formed City of Tualatin.

Oscar held many jobs and in the early days he ran a trucking business and sold goods at the original Portland Market, a lengthy ride in its own with no I-5 freeway. The roads of 105th Avenue, and Blake Street were hand shoveled and excavated out by Oscar and a couple of the area neighbors, to become Helenius Road. Raising produce and pigs, and later many chickens for eggs and meat, the surplus eggs and veggies were bartered for other items that could not be made at home, like salt and sugar. Neighbors relied upon one another as the American and European nations fell into the financial ruins of the great depression. Without wages or even food, a government program called WPA (Works Program Administration) was established by Franklin D. Roosevelt offering families' opportunities to put them back to work. As a result, Helenius Road was extended as a gravel road all the way up the hill. Then in the 60's was paved and renamed to become what they are today, 105th Avenue, Blake Street and 108th Avenue.

Oscar continued to make a living by painting many of Portland's bridges, with frequent stories of how he and his son Harry would sometimes fall off of these bridges into the Willamette River while doing their jobs. He was also a cement mason as was his son Harry. Around the corner his son built a home for his own family where his wife Emily served for over 30 years as a popular teacher and librarian at the old Tualatin Elementary School. As members of Tualatin's VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) they remained very patriotic citizens and each time a local immigrant became a U.S. citizen, as many immigrants came to this area, the Helenius' would hold a naturalization party to celebrate homage to this nation, establishing their commitment to our community of working hard and caring so much.

The home of Oscar M. Helenius is a noteworthy piece in a terrain of mix use and during a time when preservation is a catchword and community's work hard to strengthen their ties to their past the record of a house can have important influence on the character of our connections. The stories of how people and societies have functioned can prompt thoughts about the human experience we seek in our modern times and with greater awareness, pride and concern, history can help us to understand the ever changing landscape and give us a new ingredient in making better decisions to add value to our quality of life.

So, the next time you drive through this area, I ask you, please slow down, and look around at the surroundings to briefly imagine 100 years of living in one area.

Happy 100th Anniversary!



Julie Makarowsky is the Secretary of the Ibach CIO, and has lived in the area since 2001.



The neighbors all chipped together to buy the oil and the county supplied the gravel to finally blacktop the road. It was the type of pavement where they would lay down oil and cover it with rock. Then later, the county re-blacktopped it using modern ways.



But as most government work projects go, the actual progress wasn't as fast as they wanted. The workers spent too much time rolling dice.



They brought in heavy machinery and finished the job in a few days.



That left a job for one guy to hand dig the ditches.



Oscar in the family pickup.



The above is a view looking down 105th towards Avery.