

More Than a Pool: Investing in a Community Gathering Place

For generations, the Gays Mills Community Pool has been a place where children learn to swim, families gather on warm summer afternoons, and neighbors connect across generations. More than just a swimming pool, it is one of the few community gathering places that serves residents throughout the Driftless Wisconsin region.

Our region is blessed with beautiful rivers and waterways, but those natural resources can also present significant dangers. Strong currents, changing water conditions, and limited supervision can make rivers hazardous, particularly for children and inexperienced swimmers. The community pool offers a controlled, supervised environment where people can learn essential water safety skills.

The pool also provides opportunities for healthy recreation in an age when many activities revolve around screens. The pool encourages physical activity, social interaction, and outdoor fun for all ages. Youth from several neighboring communities including Soldiers Grove, Wauzeka, Seneca, and DeSoto, have long made use of the pool by participating in lessons and other activities.

Unfortunately, maintaining a community asset like the pool comes with significant costs. In 2019, The Friends of Gays Mills spearheaded a fundraiser to improve access to the pool by adding stairsteps into the water, improved safety with a new diving board, sandblasted and refinished the pool surface, repaired the pool deck, and purchased tables, chairs, and umbrellas for the pool deck. Recently, a plumbing leak required the removal of a portion of the pool deck to make repairs. A new fence was also put in and the pump-house plumbing was replaced.

These recent necessary improvements required the Village to take on a \$145,000 loan to cover the costs. While pool admissions and seasonal fees help offset some of the expense of operating the pool, they do not generate enough revenue to fully cover the loan payments and ongoing operational costs. Community pools like ours rarely pay for themselves through admissions alone.

Their true value lies not in the dollars collected at the gate, but in the benefits they provide to our Village and the surrounding communities. The pool improves public safety. It supports public health. It strengthens community connections. It gives children opportunities to learn, grow, and stay active. These are benefits that cannot be measured solely on a balance sheet.

Preserving a resource like the community pool requires community investment. While the Village has made significant improvements to ensure the pool remains safe and accessible, the costs of maintaining this important asset continue to grow. The future of the pool depends on the people and communities it serves.

The fundraising effort is already receiving encouraging support. An anonymous local family recently contributed \$500, while Arthur Windsor donated \$2,200 on behalf of Strang Heating & Electric, Inc. During the recent offseason, The Showen Company generously donated labor and materials to renovate the bathrooms and changing facilities. These contributions demonstrate the community spirit that has long helped sustain the pool.

Every donation, regardless of size, helps preserve a resource that has served thousands of children, families, and visitors throughout the Driftless Area. Whether you learned to swim at the pool, watched your children take lessons there, enjoyed summer afternoons with friends, or simply believe every community

deserves safe and affordable recreational opportunities, your contribution can help ensure the pool remains available for future generations.

Since the 1950's, the Gays Mills Community Pool has given our community far more than a place to swim. It has provided memories, friendships, opportunities, and a safe place for children to grow and learn. Now it is our turn to give back.

Donations to support the Gays Mills Community Pool Fund can be made at Royal Bank or through the Village by mailing a check, using the Village's secure online payment portal or by calling the Village office at 608-735-4341.

Together, we can ensure that future generations of children have a safe place to learn to swim, families have a place to gather, and our Driftless communities continue to have a shared space where connections are built and memories are made.