



Part of the original plan of creating the "model town" of Gwinn was this boulevard design for Pine Street. (Journal photo by Brian Halbrook)

'Model town' gains national recognition

By KRISTIE HEINONEN
Journal Staff Writer

GWINN — Gwinn historian Richard Wills is thrilled to see his hometown listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Wills, 48, a third generation "Model Towner," assisted on the project.

The official name is Gwinn Model Township Historic District, Forsyth Township, Marquette County, Michigan project.

"The listing of Gwinn on the register undeniably affirms the local and national importance of the history of Gwinn," said Wills, a 10-year member of the Forsyth Township Historical Society, said.

Not only is this an incredible honor, but in Gwinn's case, it's also unusual because normally only one or two buildings receive the honor, but the entire town of Gwinn is on the register.

Perhaps the reason for this is the two men who built Gwinn and the original de-

sign of the town, Wills said.

Gwinn was built by the Cleveland-Cliffs Iron Company in the early 1900s as a planned industrial community.

CCI President William Mather hired Warren H. Manning, a well-known town planner, to design Gwinn.

Mather and Manning's concept — a well-designed layout of streets, parks, houses, and commercial and public buildings surrounded by parks and woodlands — became a model for other communities, hence the nickname Model Town.

Nominating Gwinn to the register was discussed for years, but the \$30,000



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nomination fee discouraged any efforts, Wills said.

Attempts to nominate individual buildings within the town were unsuccessful.

In early 1998, retirements at the State Historic Preservation Office made short-term money available for special projects. Aware of the importance of Gwinn, the State Historic Preservation Office took the unusual move of funding the nomination process, Wills said.

"We were glad we could fund this," said Bob Christensen, National Register project coordinator for the State Historic Preservation Office in Lansing.

Wills said it was extremely rare for the office to fund a nomination.

"They will help out with funding or give information on how to get funding, but they will rarely fund an entire project. That tells people how significant this is," Wills said.

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Besides the honor, many communities containing National Register sites use the status as a springboard to historic rehabilitation and renovation within their communities and as a way to improve tourism.

"We believe this will help put Gwinn on the map as a tourist destination," said Jeanette Maki, president of the Gwinn-Sawyer Chamber of Commerce.

Gwinn is listed on the National Register for its national significance in community planning and development and for its significance as a work of landscape design.

"We're pleased that this has finally happened," Christensen said. "It's something that we talked about at the State Historic Preservation Office for at least the 22 years I have been working here."

The National Register is part of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior, and is the federal government's official list of properties deemed worthy of preservation because of the town's importance in American history and culture.

"As an organization we feel a great deal of pride in this accomplishment. We are grateful to anyone who assisted in making this happen. It has been one of our goals," Wills said.

The Forsyth Township Historical Society, which has 220 members, is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year.

"This is a pretty good birthday present," Wills said.

Wills said that if Manning were to come to Gwinn today, he could still find his way around.

"It's still basically intact," he said.

Although a plaque is not available yet to commemorate the historic event, plans are being made to pick a site.

"It might be another year before the plaque is up," Wills said.

The designation was made June 24 and lists Gwinn as the Gwinn Model Township Historic District, Forsyth Township, Marquette County, Michigan. The district boundaries include most of the plat of Gwinn and its surrounding green areas.