Zeeland celebrates addition of hall to National Register

By Zachary Vietz
Zeeland on June 25 celebrated the confirmation of its hall being added to the National Register of Historic Places. This allows the hall access to funding and other federal programs to keep the building in serviceable condition, as well as mark it as a cultural centerpiece in the area.

The event started with a traditional German-Russian lunch at noon with speakers following at 1:30 p.m. Throughout the event there was an exhibit and a booth with books from the German-Russian Heritage Collection. NDSU’s Michael Miller manned the booth. On display was an engraved rifle that was donated to Zeeland by Ken Dockter during the celebration of the city’s centennial celebration in 2002. Dockter had initially purchased the rifle at a benefit auction, but then donated it back to the city afterward.

The first speaker of the event was Mayor Piers Lacher. He was excited to have so many people attend and show their support. He thanked multiple people from the community for making the gathering and National Register designation a possibility. He went on to introduce Professor of N.D. State University Distinguished Professor of History Dr. Tom Isern and his wife, Editor in Chief of the NDSU Press Dr. Suzanne Kelley. He also welcomed Kyle Frederick “Bubba” Schweigert, the University of North Dakota’s head football coach and native of Zeeland.

Regina and John Schweigert posed for a formal picture. He was the WPA foreman for the Zeeland Hall project in 1936. Dr. Isern worked for several years to get the hall recognized as an historically important building. He noted the building as a “wonderful, historic property” with a “high level of integrity.” Integrity meaning the building has held up well over the years and has not been significantly altered. It is an extensive process to get a building on the NRHP. Dr. Isern worked with various people from the community to make it a possibility. With help from City Auditor Joyce Scherr, who is also the school’s business manager, and Mayor Lacher, Dr. Isern set up a forum in Zeeland on Nov. 15, 2015, for people to come and share their memories of the hall. Dr. Isern thanked Scherr for being the “mover and shaker” in Zeeland to get things moving. He also had help from his graduate assistants, Amanda Biles and Clarence Herz, who did the initial data gathering about the Zeeland Hall.

The hall was built under the WPA during the Great Depression. The WPA’s goal, Dr. Isern said, was to bring jobs back into communities. Mayor M.M. Braun was responsible for shepherding the proposal through the city council at the time. The community had to organize and provide half the $20,000 in funds, as well as leadership, for the project. That is exactly what Zeeland did.

Heather Fischer was also present. She is an architecture and landscape architecture lecturer at NDSU who helped professionally.

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EVENT

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describe the Zeeland Hall architecture for the registration form.

The Zeeland Hall was done in a Colonial Revival style, which spoke to the values of those who lived there. Fischer read from a textbook description saying this style meant a showing of “moral superiority” and “traditional values” seen through the restraining of decorative elements.

Dr. Isern went on to suggest ideas on how to keep the Zeeland Hall alive and well. “Deferred maintenance is what kills historic buildings” he said. “Do some stuff here. Bring about it.”

By keeping people coming to the hall for events, such as weddings and dances, and donating to its maintenance, the hall can be around for many future generations to enjoy, he said.

Mayor Lacher introduced Bubba Schweigert, the final speaker that afternoon. Growing up, Bubba was frequently in the hall for school events and other various town activities. After thanking everyone for showing up for this important day, Bubba shared many fond memories from his childhood he had in the hall. He noted how important this building was and continues to be for the people of Zeeland.

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