



**June 2025**

## **Jaskulski Presents the History of the Hales Corners Fire Department at May 21st Program**

For nearly a century, Hales Corners has been fortunate to have excellent firefighting services. On May 21st, Peter Jaskulski, the current chief of the Hales Corners Fire Department (HCFD), narrated the department's 98 years of growth, achievements, and challenges in a presentation entitled "When Fire Engines Were Red: The History of the Hales Corners Fire Department."

Chief Jaskulski began by noting that he had access to two invaluable sources in creating his presentation: first, the research used by the late Harry Heileman, author of the book *When Fire Engines Were Red*, published by the Hales Corners Historical Society in 2001; and

second, the minutes from every HCFD monthly meeting from 1927 to 1971 (a rarity among local communities, as many have destroyed their fire departments' records).

The initial meeting to begin establishing the all-volunteer HCFD was held on February 14, 1927. The department's first fire engine was delivered in August. Although fully operational by late 1927, the department did not fight its first fire until early 1928.

In addition to fighting the Village's fires, for many years HCFD provided services for a fee to other communities that did not have their own fire

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**The HCHS program on the history of the Village Fire Department drew an audience of more than 60 people.**

## In Memoriam

Our Society lost one of its founding members when **Dave O'Brien** passed away at age 90 on May 2, 2025, just five months after the passing of his wife, Kathy. Our sincere condolences go out to his daughter, **Connie Anderson**, sons **Kelly** and **Jack**, and their families.

Dave was truly a multi-faceted individual. While employed by RCA as an aerospace engineer, he designed radar components. After moving to Martin Marietta, he worked on thermoelectrical generators and nuclear fuel capsules for Voyager I and II missions.

In 1969, Dave, Kathy, and their children moved to Hales Corners when Dave accepted a job with Allis Chalmers as an engineering supervisor on the con-

struction of aerospace fuel cells. When the company left that field, Dave was reluctant to move his family again, so decided to try something different. He founded Copy Corner, a copying and duplicating shop, which evolved over time into a full-service printer. Dave built much of the equipment himself. Kathy helped out in the shop as her schedule allowed. The shop was open from 1972 to 1985.

Dave later taught design and drafting at MATC, and worked as a mechanical design consultant from 1985 until his retirement in 2003.

HCHS began when Dave, as a member of the Hales Corners Chamber of Commerce, invited Richard Kuether, author of *A Historical Geography of Hales Corners, WI*, to speak to the group in 1971 about forming a

historical society. A committee was formed, chaired by Dave, and he promoted the idea at a Fourth of July parade by distributing 2,000 flyers. Three years later, in 1974, the Society was officially established.

Subsequently, Dave's involvement with HCHS included historic Village tours, July 4th Parade float construction, Christmas open house fundraisers, plant sale fundraisers, Ben Hunt Cabin signage, and the restoration of the Seneca Hale Summer Kitchen.

In 2006, Dave received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Village of Hales Corners for his service to the community through other organizations. He served on the Public Works Commission, the Hales Corners Chamber of Commerce, the Badgerland Striders Fire-



*Dave played a few Christmas songs on his guitar at the HCHS Christmas House in 2010.*



*Dick Riebs and Dave were in costume as tour guides during the Holz Motors grand opening of its new showroom in 1988. The event also promoted HCHS and the publication of its first history book.*



cracker Four, the Fourth of July Parade, and the Bicentennial Committee.

His creativity helped bring many projects to fruition. Dave directed traffic studies and raised funds to complete the "Bikecentennial" Bike/Pedestrian Path, from Edgerton Elementary School to 116th Street. He also led a 40-person team of volunteers to construct a pedestrian bridge over the creek in Cobb Park.

We will always be grateful for the time and effort Dave gave to HCHS. Rest in peace, sir.



*Our monthly Cabin sign was engineered by Dave so it can be folded up and rolled away.*



*Dave turned this old trailer into a 4th of July float for HCHS in 2014.*



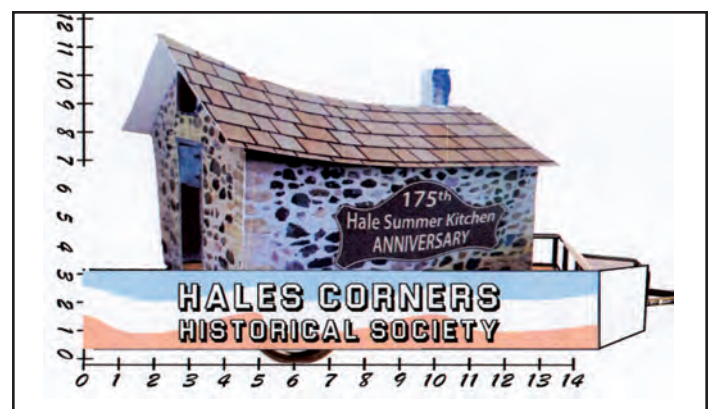
*Dave expressed his opinion at the program on Milwaukee Prohibition by Steve Schaffer in 2024.*



*During the 2012 HCHS Christmas House, Dave entertained visitors with his harmonica.*

## **HCHS Float Celebrates the Seneca Hale Summer Kitchen's 175th Anniversary**

This year is the 175th anniversary of the Seneca Hale Summer Kitchen, which is the oldest surviving structure in Hales Corners. HCHS was responsible for saving the Summer Kitchen and creating the historic display adjacent to it. To commemorate this anniversary, HCHS volunteers are building a float for the upcoming 4th of July parade. See the sketch at right.



departments. That arrangement helped generate the revenue needed to grow HCFD, purchase new fire engines, and upgrade equipment. Greenfield was the most frequent user of our Village's fire and rescue services until late 1960 when it formed its own department, resulting in an 85% drop in revenue for HCFD.



***Original HCFD firehouse bell  
c.1932***

In November 1961, the all-volunteer HCFD was dissolved, and on January 1, 1962, the Village of Hales Corners took over the operation of the department. Since then, HCFD has been led by a succession of chiefs who have focused on enhancing service to the community by purchasing state-of-the-art fire engines and rescue vehicles, structuring department staffing and schedules to assure 24/7 availability, and focusing on upgrading rescue service capabilities to state-licensed Paramedic level.

Chief Jaskulski's presentation included discussion of notable incidents in which HCFD has rendered firefighting or emergency rescue service. Perhaps the most widely-known are the 1972 Nowicki house fire that resulted in the deaths of the family's five daughters, and the 1999 auto accident in which six teens plunged into a Whitnall

Park pond, resulting in two deaths and numerous injuries.

Among the 60 attendees at the evening's program were a number of current and retired HCFD personnel. They were asked to stand and be recognized for their service to the community, and they received a warm round of applause.



***Vintage HCFD shields from the  
1940s, 1950s, and 1960s***



***A Plectron radio receiver was used from the late 1950s to the early 1980s. It was assigned to each HCFD member to alert them when an emergency response was required.***



***HCFD helmets were on display including those of the  
2nd Assistant Chief and Chief Peter Jaskulski.***



## The “Force” Was with the Library and Ben Hunt’s Cabin

On May 3rd, the Hales Corners Library became the site of a Jedi Training Academy, as children of all ages gathered there for a Star Wars Day Celebration. Activities included Escape Room missions, Wookiee Roar contests, lightsaber crafting, Jedi braiding, and an obstacle course.

Trainees also enjoyed Storytime and a screening of *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. Even **Ben Hunt** became involved as he met with members of the Empire at his cabin in a galaxy far, far away.



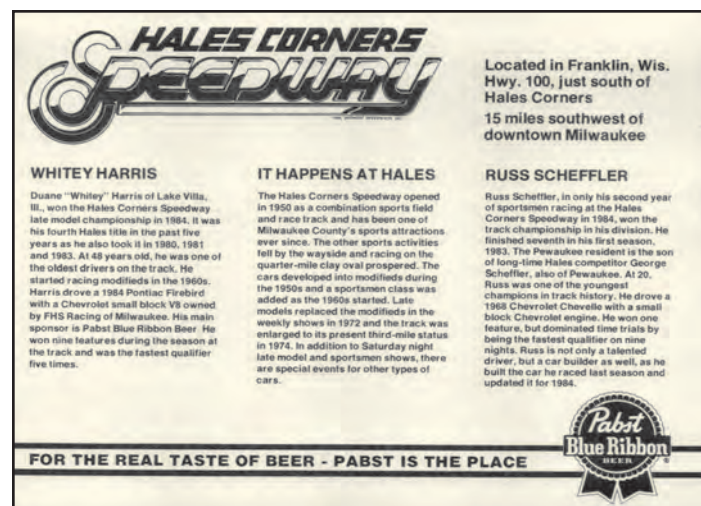
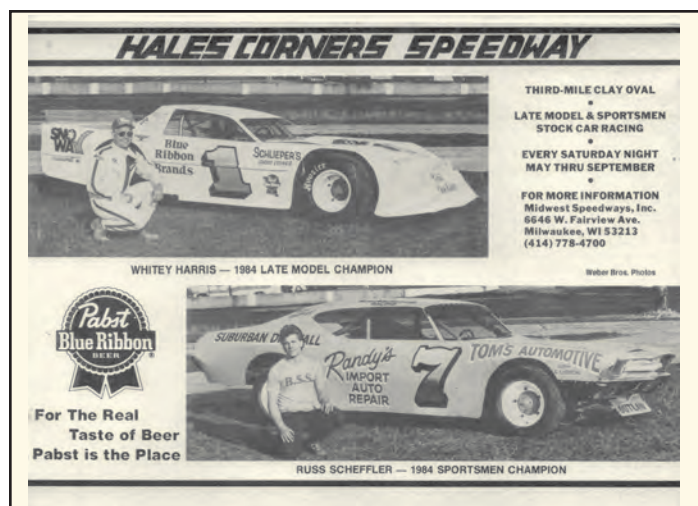
## Hales Corners Speedway Opened 75 Years Ago

The quarter-mile dirt track oval opened on June 18, 1950, and featured a wide variety of racing thrills through the years, including midget, modified and sportsmen, late-model stock, and sprint cars. Thursday night races were a popular draw in the 1960s and early 1970s, and the track was expanded to one-third mile in 1974.

The Speedway also was the site of concerts, flea markets, thrill shows, and even tractor-pulls. For more than 50 years, the Hales Corners Speedway was a landmark in the area. Sold to make way for a Menards store, it is memorialized by the road nearby, Speedway Drive.

Last fall, HCHS member **Robert Wardinski** donated several postcards and stickers that advertised racing events in the area. It seemed appropriate to wait until the Speedway’s anniversary month to post this article. The images below show one of Robert’s items, a two-sided postcard from 1985 featuring drivers Whitey Harris and Russ Scheffler. Unfortunately, there is no information regarding their race dates, but we can assume they both drank a certain locally brewed beverage whether they won or lost.

Thank you, Robert, for adding to our collection!



## TALES OF THE CORNERS - JUNE From the files of the *Tri-Town News and Hub*

### 90 YEARS AGO (1935)

- Pavers are working on the 30-foot strip along the new Highway 100 from Hales Corners to Dillman's Corners (Loomis Road and Highway 100).
- The electric company is laying a completely new set of tracks and switches in the Village on the east side of Highway 100 as far as the intersection at North Cape Road.
- Freede-Eckel American Legion Post members approve remodeling their meeting room in the old Hales Corners Post Office basement at the Godsell Building on Forest Home Avenue and Janesville Road. Members also approve holding a street carnival to celebrate the opening of the new Highway 100.
- A hearing is held by the public service commission on the extension of the Forest Home Avenue bus line to Hales Corners.
- Mayor M.V. Baxter of West Allis speaks on class struggle at the regular meeting of the Hales Corners branch of the Socialist Party in its headquarters at 110th Street and Liberty Avenue.
- Hales Corners Fair prices include eggs for 27 cents a dozen, green onions and asparagus at six bunches for 15 cents, tomato and pepper plants for 15 cents a dozen, chickens at 18 cents a pound, and potatoes at 50 cents a bushel.

### 80 YEARS AGO (1945)

- The Freede-Eckel American Legion Post holds Memorial Day services at the Emanuel Evangelical Church Cemetery. Almost 1,400 poppies are sold this year.
- State Bank Hales Corners was stabilized in July 1932 during the Depression. The bank is now ready to make the final dividend payment on funds held by the bank at that time. Overall payment is 92.5 cents on the dollar.
- Hales Corners School graduates 19 students.
- Unseasonably cold weather frosts bites victory gardens.
- Removal of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) barracks from Whitnall Park will be completed by July 1st. One building will be kept for storing park equipment. Fourteen barracks are sold at auction.

- Private 1st Class Irene Wahler, of Hales Corners, requests a discharge after 18 months in the Women's Army Corps (WAC) due to her husband's illness.
- John Meinzer is elected president of the Hales Corners Businessmen's Club.

### 70 YEARS AGO (1955)

- "Operation Mosquito" creates a thick fog over Village streets.
- Twenty-seven pupils graduate from Hales Corners Elementary School.
- The first class to graduate from the new St. Mary's School totals 17 students.
- The Village Board approves a plat of Hales Happiness Homesites just north of the Village.
- Local officials meet to begin plans for answering questions at next month's meeting concerning the creation of a union high school district in the Hales Corners area.
- Ritzman Appliance Co., 10816 W. Janesville Road, holds an eight-day sale for its fifth anniversary.

### 60 YEARS AGO (1965)

- The Hales Corners Village Board passes an ordinance restricting the number of horses that can be kept in residential areas to at least one acre for the first horse and three acres for each additional horse.
- Gervais Meinzer is ordained at Emanuel United Church of Christ.
- Diane Kern is the new Hales Corners Junior Miss.

### 50 YEARS AGO (1975)

- The Hales Corners Bicentennial Committee sponsors a picnic at Cobb Park on 116th Street and Janesville Road. Picnic-goers enjoy sack races, a watermelon eating contest, and dunking Fire Chief Karl Kearns in the dunk tank. Everyone has a chance to nail a plank on the new bridge over Whitnall Park Creek that links the two sections of the park together.



### HALES CORNERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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