

The Story of the Unity Village Fountains

In 1922, J.C. Nichols designed Kansas City, Missouri's Country Club Plaza, an area famous for its Mediterranean architecture and fountains. Fifteen miles away, another Kansas City area landmark was budding. Rickert Fillmore, son of Unity founders Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, had designed and built an English Cotswold-style home at the 58-acre Unity Farm. It was the first of many construction projects to one day become part of the 1400-acre town of Unity Village.



The house Rickert Fillmore designed for himself in 1921.

“There was something about my father and his house that attracted interesting people,” said Rickert’s daughter, Rosemary Fillmore Rhea.

Among known friends and visitors: artist Thomas Hart Benton, developer J.C. Nichols, Kansas City mayor H. Roe Bartle, Hallmark founder Joyce Hall, champion equestrienne Loula Long Combs of nearby Longview Farm, and architect Mary Rockwell Hook.

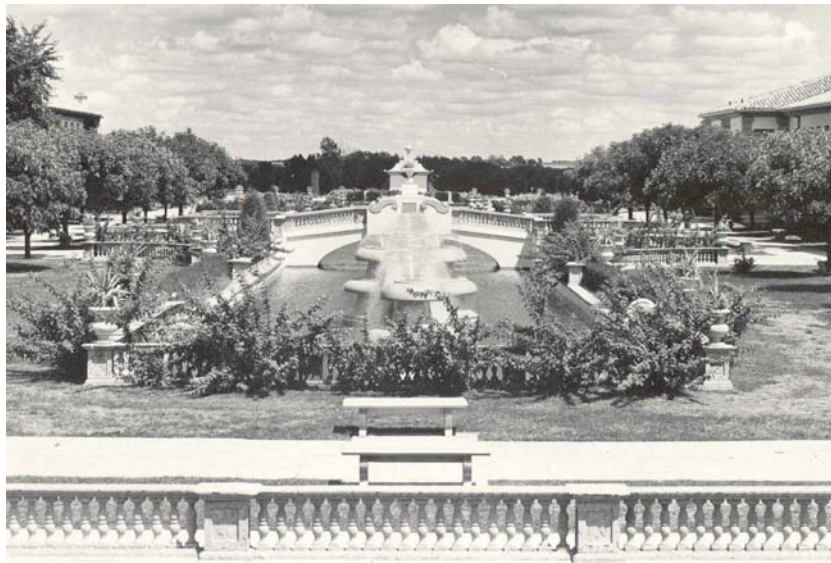
Rickert, a talented artist, created the master plan for Unity Village and oversaw its construction until his passing in 1965. The influence of his friendships with early Kansas City developers, as well as his own study in Europe, is evident in the Italian Renaissance architecture and prominent use of decorative fountains.

Unity Village has 10 fountains on grounds. The most spectacular installation is a series of three mirror pools and fountains that covers 14,090 square feet, about a third of an acre,

across Unity's central courtyard. Presently under renovation, the restored central fountains will pay tribute to Rickert's vision.

The Central Courtyard Fountains

Now a landmark, the central courtyard fountains originally had both a decorative and functional purpose. Construction of the mirror pools began in the early 1920s, as part of the campus' air-conditioning system. In the early 1950s, when growth and expansion increased the cooling demands at Unity Village, cast-concrete dome fountainheads and spray nozzles were added to cool water for the chiller equipment. The water sprayed higher as the temperature rose.



This picture, taken in 1954, shows one of three mirror pools and the Bridge of Faith.

More cost-effective and efficient air-conditioning systems replaced the fountain cooling system in the 1990s. But with the flowing water, manicured landscaping, historic Unity Tower views, the arching Bridge of Faith and an award-winning Rose Garden, the central courtyard fountains remained a popular gathering spot.

“Both my grandfather and my father envisioned the fountains as a special place where people would gather — an inspirational place, where flowing water would induce feelings of tranquility and peace,” said Charles R. Fillmore, son of Rickert Fillmore.

In 2003, a large section of deteriorated concrete in the fountains collapsed, and the reflecting pools sat empty. A capital campaign to raise the \$3.1 million dollars needed for the fountain restoration began in 2007. Nearly 4,000 donors worldwide contributed funds

through cash donations and by purchasing engraved brick pavers, which will line the new walkways surrounding the restored fountains.

Fountain Construction in Progress

Since the construction project began in April 2010, construction workers, mounds of dirt and heavy machinery have been the employees' views from buildings lining the courtyard. Before the fountains could flow again, workers had to make repairs to Unity's underground tunnel system and upgrade the 1.5 miles of underground piping that will distribute water to the fountains.

Much of the tunnel deterioration was under the Administration Building. Employees with window offices on the first floor of that building have been watching the construction from ring-side seats. "At times, I could've opened my window and handed workers a coffee," said Phil Huff, director of distribution at Unity.

Unity's 400 employees have endured almost six months of drilling, hammering and alternate walking routes—and have done so graciously, knowing soon the stunning views will more than make up for any temporary inconvenience.



Tunnel work outside the Administration Building, June 2010.



Construction progress, August 2010.

In addition to the flowing fountains, large flowering urns, ornamental lighting, and pathways of engraved brick pavers will also grace the courtyard. Long rows of mature columnar maple trees will run the length of the fountains, adding bright hues of orange and red each fall.

To celebrate the completed project, and in gratitude for the some 4,000 donors who made the restorations possible, Unity is hosting a [Fountain Celebration](#), with wine, heavy hors d'oeuvres and live music, from 5:30-8:30 p.m. Thursday, September 9, 2010.

Unity President and CEO Charlotte Shelton said she believes hundreds of people will join in this celebration because of the beauty of the fountains and their metaphysical significance. “The fountains have a deep emotional connection for many—they symbolize and affirm prosperity, the flow of life and renewal,” she said.

The central courtyard will also have deep significance for those whose loved ones and special occasions are memorialized on the brick pavers surrounding the fountains. [Commemorative pavers](#) are still available for a minimum donation of \$125.

The Fountains and the Future

Unity President and CEO Charlotte Shelton said she envisions the newly restored fountains bringing more people together.

“People often select Unity Village as a pretty spot for senior portraits and engagement photos. Many come out to walk around the grounds or the rose garden. We also host about 70 weddings each year, in addition to numerous civic and corporate meetings and

events,” Shelton said. “It’s our intention that the flowing fountains will make Unity Village an even more attractive destination for the community and beyond.”



Unity Village is a popular location for weddings, spiritual retreats and corporate meetings.

Unity Village is also a retreat and educational center, offering practical, spiritual teachings that empower abundant and meaningful living. Unity currently hosts about a thousand guests each year for retreats and spiritual education classes. Thousands more are served through online classes and radio programs, broadcast from the Village’s fully-equipped production facility.

Recently, Unity launched a new web site, especially for guests traveling to Unity Village or hosting events on campus. The site is located at www.unityvillage.org.