

# *A.L. Allen & Sons Land Co. 70<sup>th</sup> Year*

In addition to his more than 30 years at A.L. Allen & Sons Land Co., Mark Allen brings a rich family history to the business started by his grandfather in 1936. The sons and grandsons of Ami L. Allen orchestrated land purchases and development that literally changed the landscape of the Fox Valley and Kane County into what it is today.

As A.L. Allen and Sons reaches its 70<sup>th</sup> year in the real estate business, Allen remembers the contributions his paternal grandfather and particularly his father made to the area.

“I remember many family gatherings at this house,” he says, referring to the former home at 317 South Third Street in downtown Geneva. The historic building was originally a barn and became a residence in 1900. The Land Company has been here since 1975, moving from its original location in the 200 block of Third Street.

Ami (pronounced with a long-I from the Biblical Amaria) founded the company in 1936 after moving from his home in Cedar Rapids, Iowa where he worked with his father in the banking business. After the Depression crippled the nation and particularly the Corn Belt, he moved to Chicago selling and refinancing Sears homes. A substantial bonus prompted him to invest in land at Crane and Route 31 in St. Charles and he started his real estate business. Ami’s four sons eventually joined him and the business now is owned and operated by Allen, whose father Jack was the oldest.



“Ami sold farms to the soldiers after World War II,” Allen said. “He became an economic force in Kane County with the sale of more than 1,000 farms.”

He also credits his grandfather with being responsible for E-3 zoning, unique in Kane County and township properties. Concerned with future growth getting out of hand, he created the zoning designation for lots no smaller than an acre-and-a-quarter, to reduce density.

Allen joined the family business in 1977. The Land Company, which still focused on commercial real estate and development, at that time also included a large Century 21 franchise that handled all residential sales. Allen wanted a much smaller operation so the franchise

was sold and he now shares residential sales with independent contractor Jeff Schielke, who also has strong ties with the area. Schielke has been Batavia’s mayor since 1981. He co-authored several books on Batavia history and was awarded Preservationist of the Year in 1995 for his role in preserving historical architecture in Batavia and Kane County.

Allen’s education and early work experience give him an edge in commercial sales and development. A graduate of Boston University, his degree in marine paleontology was to attract the attention of big oil companies. Instead, he got a job with the Kane County Development Department, and

began to document unique biological and archeological property in the county that should not be developed such as recently acquired forest preserves.

His next job was Donahue and Thornhill Land Surveyors. Both these jobs, Allen says, helped him better understand Kane County’s farms, wetlands, flood plans and development properties.

“I can look at a parcel and say it’s 40 acres,” he said. “I can find corners, tiles, wetlands, biologically unique features or unique habitats.”

He adds that his skill is the result of 30 years of experience, and coupled with his knowledge of zoning, Allen is able to understand client needs and provide the benefit of his vast experience.

Allen remains confident that the current slowdown in the market will pass soon enough and is based on a typical seasonal slowdown due to past increases in value. He said that while the last 10 years were more “order taking,” watching market values improve 100 percent, his philosophy remains “patience.”

“This isn’t a long-term slowdown,” Allen said. “Here in Kane County and the Fox River Valley, we have feathered our nest.

“We are highly diversified in industry, and the population growth is enormous. The growth will continue. Expect better times in the spring.”