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Orland Hills to mark 50 years with party

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John Sudar, mayor of Westhaven from 1971-73, was sitting in Dan D Jac's, a local bar and grill, recently pointing toward city landmarks and developments, explaining what bustling Orland Hills looked like when he moved to town.

"There was nothing there. It was just prairie," he said gesturing to the south.

He turned his gaze 90 degrees and repeated, "More prairie."

"Over there, that was forest," said the 84-year-old Sudar, pointing higher and farther out.

To understand how Orland Hills turned from the sleepy village of Westhaven, population 470, to the active town of more than 7,000 it is today, one needs to look no further than the development of the town's police department. To begin raising capital for the fledgling town, which didn't have a police department, Sudar's first move was to double the price of vehicle permit stickers to \$5.

Police officers were hired, one at a time.

"We held a big dance to buy supplies. There were 200 people there, a lot for the time," Sudar said. "Everything but the band had been donated, and with the money raised we bought the policemen badges and uniforms."

In 1986, Westhaven became Orland Hills in an attempt to more closely identify with Orland Township and capitalize on the commercial opportunities of Orland Park.

By the time John Daly became village administrator in 1994, Westhaven had become Orland Hills, the population had surpassed 6,000, and there had been major economic development, including the construction of one of the Southland's most successful Wal-Mart stores.

But the city still was operating out of modest habitations. A split-level home served as the village hall, and a ranch-style home next door was the police station, he said.

"While waiting to be processed, they'd handcuff (arrestees) to these big I-bolts and make them sit on the benches," Daly said.

Today, a village hall built in 1995 houses the current administration and police department. A force of 33 full and part-time officers patrols the streets.

Orland Hills celebrates its 50th anniversary this weekend, with a festival that includes musical acts, fireworks and a family-oriented Sunday that includes magicians, reptiles and face painting.

The event in Kelly Park will kick off Friday night at 6 p.m. and run until 9 p.m. on Sunday. Food and beverages will be available for purchase from a number of local vendors.

All proceeds from the 50th anniversary celebration will be donated to the United Service Organization, which provides entertainment for deployed member of the U.S. military.

"We're really going to have fun with it," Hastings said. "We've got some fantastic music and activities going all weekend. It's going to be great."

- Caption: Sudar Brett Roseman

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