

'I do,' again

Local couples renew wedding vows at Scidmore Park ceremony

By Robert Tomlinson
Staff Writer

THREE RIVERS — Three park benches were laid out in a neat row on the east side of Scidmore Park in Three Rivers, right behind the Farmer's Market. A table with cake, assorted utensils, and sparkling grape juice was waiting nearby. That, along with a perfect, sunny day, awaited friends and family members of those attending a special ceremony held at the park Thursday.

Right next to the Rocky River, near a tree and next to an old well, sat the ceremony, where 10 couples renewed their wedding vows.

"It's a beautiful location, and it's a great thing to renew that commitment," John Gelvin said. He and his wife, Deb, have been married for 47 years. They said they have been planning to renew their vows for some time, but they hadn't done anything about it.



Several couples renewed their wedding vows during a ceremony at Scidmore Park Thursday. Each couple signified the renewal of their vows with a kiss during the ceremony.

"It was announced at the Commission on Aging they were going to do it," John Gelvin said. "When they told us that, we thought that we should go and do this."

"We've been married 47 years, so we thought it'd be nice to just renew that commitment to each other," Deb Gelvin said. "We were going to wait until 50, but

since they were doing it, we thought, why not now?"

The St. Joseph County Commission on Aging put on the special ceremony, in partnership with St. John's Lutheran Church and Trinity Lutheran Church of Three Rivers and Lutheran Church of the Savior of Kalamazoo.

"This was a very cool event, and I loved it," Ruth

Mancina, marketing director for the St. Joseph County Commission on Aging, who helped coordinate the ceremony, said. "It's just such a romantic thing to see."

Mancina said the idea for the ceremony came from a COA member who participated in something similar while in Florida.

"One of our seniors, Pat

Dane, who used to work for the COA as a receptionist, suggested the idea to me," Mancina said. "Pat went to Florida for the winter and did it down there. She came back and she showed us, told us all about it. Sam [Stone, COA activities director] and I thought it was a great idea and Pat said we should do it here."

So, the preparation

began. A cake was donated by professional baker Linda Lotfi of LaGrange, Ind., the sparkling grape juice was bought, certificates for the couples were made, and pictures of the couples with the cake were taken prior to the ceremony. Scidmore Park, Mancina said, was the "perfect setting for a ceremony."

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Pastor James Smith of St. John's and Trinity and Pastor Nikki Smith of Lutheran Church of the Savior, themselves a married couple, officiated the ceremony.

"It's really cool to be doing this. We only got married ourselves three years ago, but many of these couples have been married much longer," James Smith said. "It's kind of neat to witness this."

Many of the couples participating in the ceremony said it was very important to renew their vows for one reason or another, including Venice

Pond, who has been married to her husband, Harold, for almost 63 years.

"We're proud we've been married this long, and it's very special," Pond said.

Pond had 11 family members show up for the ceremony, with most of them coming from out-of-state as a surprise.

"That was wonderful. We didn't know they were coming until they came walking in this morning," Pond said. "It made the whole ceremony even more special."

The ceremony itself started with a reading from I Corinthians 13:1-13,

where it talks about the concept of love, and how it "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things."

Following the reading, the Smiths reflected on their own experiences before and during their marriage, and the idea and values regarding marriage, including how it is, as Nikki put it, "a special kind of relationship."

"It is a blessing to have a partner to be with you no matter what, and to grow with you, and to help you be your best self as you help them be their best self," Nikki said. "Marriage is a

reminder of the beauty of human love, and also of the incredible beauty of God's love for us."

All 10 couples then stood up and renewed their vows with a simple, "I do," and each celebrated with a kiss.

"I got kind of choked up at the end, and so did Deb," John Gelvin said. "It's just that we've known we've loved each other all along, but it's just nice to say it to each other."

"Being married this long, you go through ups and downs. It's just nice to know that we've stuck through it, and we're good," Deb Gelvin said. "We've fought

through the good times and the bad times, and it's nice to renew all those vows and think about it."

Darl Brown, who has been married to his wife Shirley for 54 years, said doing a renewal of vows is akin to renewing the "testimony" of a marriage.

"Anytime you can give your testimony to others that it is in Christ that your marriage has flourished and survived, it's a wonderful thing."

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