

Richard H. Schneider
Marshfield City Engineer, 1948 – 1978

Nominated by Michael D. Meyers.

Richard H. Schneider was perhaps one of the most significant individuals in the history of the city of Marshfield, considering his involvement in numerous plans for future growth and development of city infrastructure and economic development during his 30 years as City Engineer.

Born in Omaha, Nebraska June 23, 1916, Schneider graduated from Creighton Preparatory School in Omaha in 1935. Richard continued his education and received a Bachelor of Civil Engineering degree in 1941 from Marquette University College of Engineering in Milwaukee. That same year, he began serving as a U.S. Naval Air Force pilot stationed in Pensacola, Florida flying supplies and passengers over the North Atlantic Ocean to Europe.

Following his discharge from the military, Richard's flying experience included Pan American-Grace Airlines (PANAGRA) based in Lima, Peru, flying South American routes until 1944. In 1944, Richard and Marjorie returned to the United States, and he flew for Trans World Airlines (TWA), where he held the distinction of flying the maiden flight for TWA to Karachi, India, now Pakistan. In total, Schneider logged over 1,500 hours of flight time as a licensed commercial pilot and 2,100 as a co-pilot up to the day in October 1946 when he halted his flying career.

In 1946, Schneider came to Marshfield and worked a short time for the Roddis Plywood Corporation. He then was employed by the State Highway Commission.

On July 1, 1948, Richard H. Schneider was hired by the City of Marshfield as assistant city engineer, a position he held for three years before becoming city engineer.

In July 1949, Schneider became the 100th member of the Marshfield based Civil Air Patrol (C.A.P.), bringing with him his previous flight experience and engineering background. Schneider supervised the construction of the C.A.P.'s 20 by 150-foot steel



building as the first permanent building erected at the local airport. It remains in use today. Schneider's interest in the growth and development continued through the years.

Schneider was hired in 1953 as city engineer. In late 1953, the State Highway Commission agreed to add a bituminous surface to the brick-lined Central Avenue, but state funding was contingent on the city changing parking in the downtown from angle parking to parallel parking. The city lacked adequate off-street parking to accommodate the 160 to 170 cars visiting local businesses which would be taken off the street if the change was made. The state eventually conceded and granted an extension to change the type of parking before a deadline of 1958 to allow the city to make an effort to provide more off-street parking. Eventually the city and its leaders gave in to the demands of the State Highway Commission, and the parking along Central Avenue was changed to parallel parking as it remains today. However, the city needed to aggressively develop city parking lots near downtown.

Schneider had developed positive communications with state officials, and the entire length of the street in the downtown was replaced in 1969 with new curb and gutter concrete pavement and sidewalks – and trees. Schneider was a huge advocate of lining the new neighborhood streets with terrace trees which remain a testament to his efforts today.

Schneider wrote numerous successful grant applications through the years that brought considerable money to the city. The city was faced with orders from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in 1973, to prevent the flow of clear water into the sanitary sewer system. Marshfield was called out for being non-compliant. At the same time, the city's application for \$5.2 million in state monies to proceed with a separate sanitary sewer project was jeopardized. Schneider moved forward an \$80,000-plus clear water elimination program regardless of not having federal guidelines and through the next several years, needed improvements were eventually made.

In 1978, then Wisconsin DNR Secretary Anthony Earl (who later became governor) made a public statement that "Dick Schneider saved the city of Marshfield \$6 million." The DNR Board had ordered tertiary treatment in the Marshfield sewage treatment site. "It was the persistent and even-handed way that city engineer Schneider responded which resulted in Marshfield not being required to build a newer facility" at that time.

The city took initial steps in 1979 to begin an aggressive street paving program rather than continuing annual street repairs. With 75 miles of unimproved streets at the time, Schneider and the city council began to replace those streets in disrepair with concrete curb and gutter pavement over a period of several years, paving two-plus miles new a

year. The projects were funded using state aid, bonding, borrowing and the cost shared by adjoining property owners.

Heavy car and truck traffic on Central Avenue through the downtown of the city on State Highways 13 and 97, prompted officials to study both an east and west bypass to alleviate the problem, beginning in 1964. For years, various routes were considered. In 1977, The State Highway Commission finally said they were not interested in participating in a bypass.

In the early 1970's, Schneider was a key player in the development of the 144-acre Marpark Industrial Park on the east border of the city. The city had purchased much of the former Wood County Hospital Asylum, in order to offer industrial land for future industrial and business development and job creation. Schneider also served as a Board member of Greater Marshfield Incorporated (GMI), then the city's quasi-government industrial development agency. He wrote the industrial park ordinance and designed the first park. After his retirement from the city career in 1978, he served as interim director of GMI.

Richard H. Schneider retired on September 30, 1978, after holding that position for 30 years. He stated, "These three decades with the city have been a source of both personal and professional fulfillment. The city, both its government and its citizens, have been good to me. Thank you for having me around."

As city engineer and into retirement, he continued to actively support efforts as a charter member of the Wildwood Zoological Society and was especially instrumental in the development of the original bear pen and aviary, and other displays.

Richard H. Schneider died April 9, 1995, in Marshfield. He was 78.