

Catherine Cordes

I am honored to be here in this lovely park – made possible through the involvement of so many who are no longer here to enjoy it as well as so many of you – who are here today. I particularly want to welcome Gordon Feltman’s family: Gordon’s wife Carol; and his daughters Laura Feltman and Shelia Feltman Weahkee, and his grand daughters Amanda Rose and Rebecca Elaine Feltman. Welcome to town employees, officials and committee members – and neighbors and friends.

Today we dedicate this bridge in memory of Gordon Feltman. It was Gordon who saw the potential for combining the interest in historic preservation of the mill site with the recreational potential of the mill pond. He wanted his grandchildren to skate in the winter on this pond. He wanted Bedford residents to have a lovely spot for kayaking and bird watching. And he wanted to see a unique part of Bedford’s history preserved for future generations.

Well, when Gordon got a vision of how things could be, he didn’t let go of it. The land belonged to the town and the historic district was accepted for inclusion in the Nation Registry of Historic Places. A good beginning but the area needed some work. The pond was overgrown with water chestnuts. The landscape needed cleaning up, stabilizing and other work to create a park-like space. Gordon knew he needed some advocates because this would not be high on the town’s priority list otherwise. Gordon asked the other selectmen to join him in setting up the Wilson Mill Park Committee.

Gordon recruited committee members right here in this neighborhood. Janice Weickman recalls him driving around in his convertible and stopping to talk to neighbors who were outside. He would tell them how much he loved the pond and what it meant to him. She says, “He was like the class president and our cheerleader.” Dorothy Africa, another neighbor recruited by Gordon to the Wilson Mill Park committee said, “He had faith that this would happen. He was determined – and we all believed him.”

Gordon also knew how to get things done. He knew the people and the processes of the town. He recognized that Community Preservation funding could pay for the necessary work. And he knew who needed to talk to whom to get things on the right agendas. He coached and cheered committee members as they carried the vision to the appropriate boards, committees and departments.

Things were going well – Community Preservation funds provided the perfect source of funding for this project. Work was done on the pond and work began on the preservation and park design. I won't go into the details except to say all this came to a grinding halt when the dam was condemned by the state. In retrospect this may have been an overall good thing. The town was forced to address the dam problem. Once again community preservation funds provided the means. Thanks to the efforts of Gordon and the committee the vision of the park had taken hold was incorporated in the design and building of the new dam.

We stand here today in the place where he – and many of you – brought that vision to light. Gordon would be proud of this beautiful park. And today I am honored to dedicate this bridge in memory of Gordon Feltman.