

A Lifetime of Service: Sam Cogdill Retires After Decades of Leadership in Dunlap

After more than four decades of continuous service to the Dunlap community, Sam Cogdill is retiring from the Dunlap Community Development Corp., closing a chapter that began in 1980 and helped shape the community Dunlap is today.

Cogdill's civic involvement dates back to 1980, when he was elected president of the Dunlap Community Club. Soon after, the organization chose to operate under its incorporated name, the Dunlap Booster Club, believing it was more practical to retain the existing legal structure than reincorporate under a new name. From that point forward, Cogdill served consecutively on either the Dunlap Booster Club or DCDC — often as president — providing steady leadership through decades of growth, challenge and change.

Early community focus

In the early 1980s, the Dunlap Booster Club concentrated on initiatives that laid the groundwork for the community's future. At that time, the group stayed busy organizing Dunlap's Fourth of July celebration, sponsoring community cleanup days, and creating programs such as a "Rent-a-Kid Service," which paired local youth with residents needing help with small jobs. Early versions of the Dunlap Shop Hop and Santa visits were also supported during this period.

The Booster Club addressed critical needs in town. In 1981, Cogdill coordinated Christmas gift assistance for 13 local families with young children.

In 1983, with the cooperation of the Dunham and Grote families, the Booster Club resurrected the Dunlap wax nativity. A new barn was built and many of the wax figures were renovated. The Dunlap Booster Club raised the funds and contributed time and effort to place the unique display on exhibit.

The organization also actively searched for a physician for Dunlap, with Cogdill serving as the primary contact. By 1986, physician recruitment efforts intensified. A community mailing generated 328 responses, demonstrating strong local support. The Doctor Search Committee, which Cogdill served on, worked to show Dunlap could sustain a physician by guaranteeing financial assistance during the doctor's first two years.

Cogdill recalled the efforts. "At that time," he said, "we had a private pharmacy, and a pharmacy does better with a medical facility in town."

Laying the groundwork for development

In 1990, Cogdill served on a committee formed to apply for Iowa's Rural Main Street pilot program, a program that focuses on revitalizing historic downtowns by providing funding, technical help, and a strategic approach for economic development, leveraging local assets like architecture and history for growth. Although Dunlap was not chosen initially,

the effort helped shape future economic development work. That momentum led to the formation of the Dunlap Community Development Corporation (DCDC) in 1991. Cogdill was named president of the DCDC board.

That same year, and as one of DCDC's first community improvement projects, a new marquee-style welcome sign was installed near the Dunlap Golf Course. The sign was built to serve as a community message board for important events and announcements.

"It was a big step for us," shared Cogdill about the sign. "It was a long process for approval."

In 1993, Gov. Terry Branstad visited Dunlap and presented the Community Economic Progress Program award to Cogdill. In remarks published in the *Dunlap Reporter*, Cogdill credited the town's progress to collaboration among many groups, including city officials and employees, the Booster Club, fire and rescue units, the historical society, school and church organizations, and numerous volunteers.

He cited Dunlap's assets — parks, a swimming pool, a golf course, medical services, a care center, a bowling alley and strong agricultural roots — but emphasized that people were the community's greatest strength.

Cogdill still today feels that sentiment. "Dunlap's a community, when people need to pull together to work, they do," he said.

That same year, DCDC purchased a 3.5-acre site that later became the Pleasant View Subdivision. And, as one of his proudest accomplishments, Cogdill announced that Western QLF had selected Dunlap as the site for a livestock feed manufacturing and distribution facility, a major milestone for the local economy.

"I'd met with the president of QLF, Kenny Berg, in Des Moines and Dunlap," Cogdill said. "The first site looked at failed environmental compliance and had to be mitigated."

Sam quickly worked to find a second potential location.

"[Berg] originally didn't know I was a feed dealer," Sam explained. "Upon finding out, he said 'I'll come to Dunlap if you become a QLF dealer.'"

Not long after, Cogdill was among 100 volunteers from southwest Iowa recognized by Branstad in 1994 for contributions to economic development.

Persistence through setbacks

In a 1993 *Broadly Speaking* column, Cogdill acknowledged that progress often came through persistence. Early development committees within DCDC had faced repeated setbacks, including unsuccessful Main Street grant applications. Still, volunteers

continued fundraising through pancake feeds, auctions and public outreach with a focus on the organization's mission.

Those efforts paid off. In 1994, DCDC was designated a Main Street Iowa community, making Dunlap eligible for consultation services and a \$22,500 grant distributed over five years.

Improving quality of life

Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, Cogdill remained deeply involved in projects that improved quality of life in Dunlap. He played a key role in efforts to restore medical services after the community had gone more than a year without a clinic, helping secure temporary space in the Heap's Electric building so providers could begin serving residents while long-term plans for a permanent facility moved forward.

He also served on a committee to plan the construction of a new swimming pool. He and others drove to other communities within the state to view pool design options. After months and months of research, planning and fundraising efforts, a new pool was constructed and opened in 1999.

Cogdill fondly remembers pushing to get the mushroom fountain at the pool added to the design.

"It was great memories," he said.

He and his wife, Sue, were involved in raising funds for the new pool.

Cogdill assisted in recruiting professionals to locate in Dunlap. Not only was he instrumental in reestablishing health services in town (on more than one occasion), but he also helped recruit an attorney to town.

In 2000, he took charge and developed a communitywide cleanup program. He presented it to the Dunlap City Council and it was approved unanimously. Cogdill was involved in many community beautification projects throughout the years, including enhancing Dunlap's main street with flags and Christmas décor for the light posts, and adding planters, benches and trash receptacles.

In 2001, Cogdill was named the Harrison County Development Corporation (HCDC) Volunteer of the Month. At the time, then DCDC manager Dwaine Hack was quoted as saying, "If I need something done or advice, he's the guy I go to."

Cogdill served on committees for the development of the shared school-community library. He and others drove to other towns around the state to see various library blueprints and help steer the course of how the new library could be laid out.

Cogdill played an instrumental role in the establishment of Dunlap's youth sports complex. The land for the youth sports complex was acquired by DCDC in a trade with the Sullivan family for 11 acres of land at the Dunlap industrial site. DCDC then donated the land for the sports complex to the city.

When the Legion building in Dunlap collapsed, Cogdill was a part of DCDC's conversations with a structural engineer to determine possible next steps for resurrecting the building. Since that time, the building has served businesses and residents alike with both commercial and residential space being leased.

Cogdill participated in discussions related to new housing developments and was an integral part in championing the installation of the Prairie Meadow Estates Housing Development. He personally funded the construction of a spec home to help stoke the project.

In later years, Cogdill continued to support community progress, including helping return pharmacy services to Dunlap and supporting the establishment of a paid executive director position at DCDC to ensure sustained focus on economic development and community vitality.

"Sam understood that strong communities don't just happen — they require consistency, leadership and a willingness to think long-term," shared Jill Schaben, DCDC Executive Director. "He has years of wisdom regarding community challenges and successes, and I have learned a great deal from him."

A lasting legacy

As Cogdill retires from the DCDC Board, his impact can be seen throughout Dunlap — in its housing, health care access, downtown vitality, recreational amenities and enduring culture of volunteerism.

"I want the community to flourish," said Cogdill. "I have lots of nieces and nephews in the area and hope to one day get a son back to the area. I've invested my life in this community."

"Sam's legacy is woven into nearly every corner of this community," said Schaben. "He didn't seek recognition — he simply showed up, year after year, and did the work. Dunlap is stronger today because of his commitment."

Cogdill's legacy is not defined by any single project, but by decades of steady leadership, persistence through setbacks and a deep belief in the value of community service.

Dunlap is stronger because Sam Cogdill kept showing up.





