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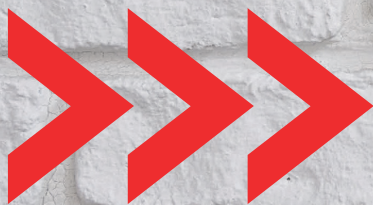
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CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
Creating Community Connections

This custom community newsletter was created and  
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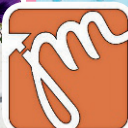
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By MATT GALIK | [www.oldmokena.blogspot.com](http://www.oldmokena.blogspot.com)

# *the* NECTAR *that* JUPITER SIPS

*The Story of Mokena Mineral Springs*

Whether it be a hard workout, an arduous hike, or a long day doing housework, a cold glass of water always hits the spot. While the sparkling goodness that flows from Mokena's faucets now comes from Lake Michigan, generations of villagers were raised on our well water, which some (present company included) maintain tasted better. There was a time when Mokena water was so desired, that it was shipped to Chicago and Joliet markets where eager customers couldn't get enough of it. Some even touted its supposed healing powers. In the first years of the 20th century, the Mokena Mineral Springs flourished as a local industry, being no small affair that put our fair village on the map for the first time.

At the turn of the century, Mokena was slowly emerging from a rough patch. The end of the 19th century was a time rife with economic turbulence and uncertainty, which led no small number of village residents to pack up and seek their fortunes elsewhere, with the town's population plummeting to an all-time low in 1900, when a federal census taker counted a

mere 281 souls living in town. The air was primed for a shift. The story begins with the poetically named Darlington T. Jones, a middle-aged native of Ohio and father of two who arrived in our environs in the last years of the 1890s. In a legal transaction completed in his wife Hattie's name, the Joneses bought a small farm immediately south of town from the Mergenthaler family for \$2,600 dollars in the spring of 1898, which they came to call "Breezy Hill." To lay out the boundaries of the farm in today's dimensions, the northern border was Denny Ave, the southern boundary stretching to contemporary LaPorte Road and the west and east boundaries laying on Center Street and at the edge of a farm in the hands of the McGovney family, today known as McGovney-Yunker farm. This little estate was quite an old one, tracing its history back to 1856 when Mokena's founding father Allen Denny first sold it to Elisha P. Wilcox of LaSalle County, when our community was a mere hamlet along the new Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad.

As Mokena historian Florence Pitman would recall decades later, Darlington Jones had a well drilled on his new property

soon after taking possession, and something about the water he struck was different; somehow out of the ordinary. The twists and turns of time have left us few details as to the exact sequence of events, but eventually the water landed in the laboratory of a city chemist, who declared it to be an exceptionally healthy sort that even had medicinal qualities. The analyst found silica, ferrous bicarbonate, calcium sulphate, and traces of potassium chloride, not to mention various other features. Darlington Jones saw dollar signs, declared his Mokena water to be "superior to almost all water on the continent." Before long, he had a windmill set up to pump the water from its source, and was supplying it to parties in Chicago.

By the summer of 1899, modest shipments of 200 to 400 gallons of the water were being made daily, with the brunt of it going to Chicago. By that fall, the total number was upped to 300 to 500 gallon lots going over the rails three or four times a week. That the Rock Island issued a special ticket for the shipment of the water, was in the words of the Will County Advertiser a "good indicator of business." That first year, Jones was using over a

thousand metal cans to transport the water, but once things really took off, specially built tank cars capable of holding a whopping 4,000 gallons were eventually used to bring the water over the railroad to market. In time, the water would be bottled in a plant near the Rock Island station in Englewood. Jones had grandiose visions of turning Breezy Hill into a health retreat, and even thought about having a hotel and sanitarium built on his property, but alas, for reasons unknown these plans never came to fruition.

At this early date, a correspondent known simply as Carl penned a piece titled "A Health Seeker Gives His Opinion of Mokena" that was carried by the Advertiser. He sang the praises of our village, writing that "the eye here commands a large scope of country and the view presented is wonderfully beautiful", going on to say "the well-tilled farms with their growing crops, and the shocks of gathered grain, lend enchantment" before rating Mokena businesses as being "represented by industrious, progressive and energetic persons." However, he heaped the best praise on the mineral springs.







The backyard of the former Cooper residence on Mokena Street was the site of the original well on Breezy Hill.

"With all of these things there is a still greater thing to boast of, and which in a year or two, will make Mokena a world-renowned town. You have a cool, pure and health-producing water."

He went on to reference the famous Sprudel water of Carlsbad, the renown spa town in today's Czech Republic, and with no small amount of pride, boasted that "the chemical analysis of Jones' spring shows it to be better, aye, 21 points its superior." Carl saw the village's new-found spring as a wave to ride, and ended his piece by proclaiming "there is a bright and prosperous future before Mokena."

At Christmastime 1901, Darlington and Hattie Jones took their profits and ran, unloading the operation to Frank E. Chamberlain and Albert P. Stevens of Joliet on December 15th. The Joneses had built up a nice little nest egg, ultimately selling the farm and spring for a tidy \$20,000, vastly more than what they paid for it. The Jolietans hired Martin Brinckerhoff to be their manager, who lived on site.

Things went swimmingly into the first years of the 20th century,

which were marked as a busy time for the new concern. In the spring of 1902, when "unusually large" shipments were going via the Rock Island to Chicago and Joliet, the stuff was whimsically referred to by the county press as "the nectar that Jupiter sips." At this time, the first specific claims regarding the medicinal power of the water began to surface, with a report from April of 1900 lauding its magic at healing rheumatic and kidney troubles. It was also known to be a laxative, which in a moment of levity, Mokena historian Florence Pitman would later remark that it was "certainly more palatable than castor oil", which was in widespread use at the time. A year later, an itinerant tea seller ran against village authorities for violating an ordinance, and while in custody made a claim that a legless man "had the member restored by a liberal use of the water." All outrageous claims considered, Mokena was looked upon to be the picture of health in these years, due in no small part to our water. A November 1903 report in the Lockport Phoenix-Advertiser credited the stuff with giving villagers longevity, noting that "in the immediate vicinity there are 30

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Still standing on today's Mokena Street, this home was built during Kate Knox's ownership of the mineral springs.

people upward of 70 years of age, and at least six are over 80, with 2 or 3 getting well up to the four score and ten mark." All this in a time when the average life expectancy for an American male was 49 years.

Business sallied forth at Mineral Springs, and by April 1908, the company was shipping out about 2 railroad cars of water a week. Nevertheless, the concern garnered some bad press in the autumn of 1908 through owner Frank Chamberlain. The premier publication of the county seat, the Joliet Weekly News, shouted from the headlines of its September 17th, 1908 issue, "Waterman's Wife Seeks Divorce", and laid out a laundry list of smears against him. Chamberlain's wife Virginia was seeking a separation on the grounds of "extreme cruelty", going on to allege that the three servants in their home were ordered to pay no attention to her, and that "her husband spends much of his time sitting around the kitchen with the hired man, reading novels and cheap

literature," not to mention the fact that he was "affected by the excessive use of tobacco." Maybe as a result of the divorce, Frank E. Chamberlain and Albert P. Stevens sold the Mokena water operation to Kate Knox, a well-to-do Chicago woman of some means. The two sellers took a hit, receiving only \$10,000, less than half of what they paid for the spring and farm on top of it. However, when the transaction was completed in the first days of 1909, the red tape of the back-and-forth between the parties stipulated that Mrs. Knox was to hand over \$5,000 worth of mineral water to Chamberlain.

As the era of Kate Knox's ownership dawned, the idea was born to pipe the water directly north from the spring to the Rock Island railroad in the village. It was a notion that came about in fits and starts, almost as soon as it started the thought was ditched, then it came about again in October 1909, but a new bump in the road surfaced in the form of Mokena liveryman Henry Stellwagen. In order to get

to where a standpipe was being built east of W.H. Bechstein's grain elevator, the pipeline had to traverse Stellwagen's land along today's Mokena Street (just south of McGovney Street) a road which did not exist at the time. Stellwagen was finessed, and a little before Thanksgiving, ultimately gave his permission for the pipeline to be built. To make the whole thing work, a three-horsepower engine was installed in the spring house at Breezy Hill.

Alas, all good things must come to an end, and in time, the Mokena Mineral Springs became part of history, which begs the question of when exactly this occurred. The date the last drops of water were pumped is long since lost to the winds of time. As late as 1912, the village' crack baseball team was still being called the "Mineral Water Boys", and the last reference to a shipment of product from the spring comes in a March 1915 news piece. It is reasonable to surmise that the water business in Mokena ceased operations in the years before America's entry into the first world war.

During her tenure on the property, Kate Knox greatly improved the farm and turned it into a first-rate poultry operation, having built a big chicken house in the spring of 1911, raising untold number of birds. She moved back to the Windy City in the summer of 1921, and sold Breezy Hill to a Mr. Patterson

of the same place for \$18,000. When the sale was first reported by Mokena's News-Bulletin, the place was still called Mineral Springs, despite the fact that it appears no water had been lifted from there in quite some time. A disastrous fire less than a year later in March 1922 decimated the historic, decades-old house on the estate. Nevertheless, the burned house wasn't the only residence at Breezy Hill, its sister, the larger domicile built during the Knox years still stands on today's Mokena Street, it being later the home of mayor Charles Swanberg.

In the aftermath of the fire, Mr. Patterson of Chicago wasn't long for the place, he having no interest in rebuilding the lost house. In turn, he sold the acreage to John and Jessie Gilmore, who had been working there the past ten years. Local historian Florence Pitman estimated that millions of gallons of water were sold during the existence of Mokena Mineral Springs, one of the most unique businesses our community has ever seen. The operation would come to lend its name to Mokena's first modern subdivision, built immediately after the end of the Second World War on the grounds of the old farm. Next time your thirst needs quenching, and you are enjoying that refreshing goodness from far off, distant Lake Michigan, just don't forget the "nectar of Jupiter" that is right beneath our own feet.



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## ANNUAL EVENTS

**JUNE 7, 2023**  
Golf Outing  
The Sanctuary Golf Course

**JULY 4, 2023**  
4th of July Parade  
Wolf Road

**JULY 15, 2023**  
Residential Garden Walk

**NOVEMBER 18, 2023**  
Parade of Lights  
Front Street

**DECEMBER 9, 2023**  
Magic of Mokena Christmas Tree  
& Window Walk  
Front Street

# READ BOOKS. WIN PRIZES!



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## SUMMER READING PROGRAM 2023

**MONDAY, JUNE 5<sup>TH</sup> - SATURDAY, JULY 29<sup>TH</sup>**

THROUGHOUT SUMMER READ ANYONE CAN PARTICIPATE IN FUN PROGRAMS FOR ALL AGES. PLUS, YOU AND YOUR FAMILY CAN WIN **PRIZES** BE REGISTERING AND LOGGING THE BOOKS THAT YOU'VE READ. ITS SIMPLE AND FUN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!

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## 2023 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Chamber Membership is the Smartest Business Investment you can make

Business Name \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Name \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

Business Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Website \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please include e-mail address to receive weekly Chamber updates)

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
\*ONLY IF DIFFERENT THAN PHYSICAL ADDRESS

Referred By \_\_\_\_\_

Description of Business (will be posted on Chamber website): \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any of these ☐ Facebook  
social media accounts ☐ Instagram  
for your company? ☐ Twitter

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## MEMBERSHIP TYPES

Regular Membership	\$195.00	\$ _____
Charitable: 501(c)3*	\$90.00	\$ _____

\*Schools/Hospitals are not eligible

- ☐ I WOULD LIKE A RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY AT MY NEW BUSINESS
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### PLEASE RETURN FORM & PAYMENT TO:

Mokena Chamber of Commerce, 11104 Front St., #1B, Mokena, IL 60448  
708-479-2468 (p) • 708-479-7144 (f) • chamber@mokena.com • www.mokena.com

Membership Fee Payment: Please submit FULL payment with application. Payment is non-refundable.

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