

A Statement on Behalf of the City and Community of Green:

Read by Valerie Wolford, communications coordinator, City of Green

September 23, 2016

Ask Green residents, what their first thought was when they heard that the historic Lichtenwalter Schoolhouse was destroyed by fire? Heartbroken. Devastated. Deeply saddened. Once they heard it was destroyed by arson, their emotions turned to anger and disbelief. How could someone be so heartless or stupid? Some followed these thoughts with “I hope it wasn’t careless teens acting irresponsibly and delinquently for the thrill of the fun of destroying property.” Some even offered pity on these (presumably) teens for being in the wrong spot at the wrong time or choosing the wrong friends or making the wrong choices on the morning of August 9.

This schoolhouse has always been about choice. It was originally built in 1885 on property that is now part of the Akron-Canton Airport. Those first students chose to walk miles to school to attend class. Then in the 1960s, Joseph Boettler, the owner of the land the schoolhouse now sits upon, decided to move it instead of letting the airport demolish it to make way for the runway. During Mr. Boettler’s ownership, he used it for many purposes – a boarding house for seasonal workers, a storage shed and other utilitarian uses. Then in the mid-90s, when the City of Green purchased the parcel of land for a park, the choice was made to restore the schoolhouse for historic purposes, even at the time not knowing just what this would entail.

From 1999 to 2002, the community rallied together to raise funds and painstakingly restored the schoolhouse. Community members, city employees and students – individuals who chose to give time or money to save a piece of our community, a piece of history that once gone could not be restored. As restoration began, the beauty of the building was unearthed – most of the original slate chalkboard was salvaged and restored. All the windows were original as well as the wood floor. The brick walls and some of the slate roof were also original – a true testament to the quality of care given to the building. Our community chose to preserve the history of this school. The history of a way of life. The history of the beginning of public school in America. And the history of individuals – the students that attended school there all those years ago. The families whose names are still known because they are the names of our streets – Boettler, Koons, Heckman, Steese, Thursby and so on.

Over the past decade, the schoolhouse etched new meaning into the hearts of our community through the eyes of third graders from Green Local Schools. Each spring, third graders would visit for a day to experience what school was like in the 1880s. Many of these third graders – some now in college and those who just visited this past spring -- have fond memories of their

day at the Lichtenwalter Schoolhouse; memories that still remain, along with the deep sadness that other children will miss this great learning opportunity.

On August 9, you also made a choice. We can only conjecture the reason for your choices. But in the end, your choice was wrong, senseless, heartless and truly hurtful to a community, and to the legacy that community built for its future children and the memorial it created to its founding families. Your choice defaced our memories. Your choice, not only did hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage, but left a huge hole in the hearts of individuals including the fifth generation of Boettlers and the many who now call Green home.

It is with sadness that our community must share this statement. Sadness not only for the loss of this beautiful piece of history, but also for you and the legacy you chose to write for yourself. Your personal history will always be marred by this senseless and destructive act. We, as a community, hope you chose to turn your bad choice into your greatest lesson and rewrite your history to ensure a legacy not only you can be proud of, but your children's children can be proud.

Presented by the City of Green with the support of:

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