

Honorary Street Sign – Dennis Downes

ORDINANCE

WHEREAS, The City of Chicago mourns the loss of our cherished community member, Dennis Downes, who passed away on February 25th, 2024, at his home in Antioch at the age of 72; and

WHEREAS, The City of Chicago has been notified of Dennis' passing by the Honorable Alderman Brian Hopkins of the 2nd Ward; and

WHEREAS, Born on May 16, 1951 in Chicago to parents Mary Berriochoa and Mathew Downes, Dennis' passion for art and history took root in his formative years in Northbrook and visiting his mother's people at a young age, the Basque Berriochoa Clan living in Idaho and Montana Rocky Mountains; and

WHEREAS, Dennis' research on Native American trail marker trees culminated in the publication of his incredible book *Native American Trail Marker Trees: Marking Paths Through the Wilderness* and numerous pieces of his masterful artwork inspired by natural and ancient sites, and his profound contributions to the preservation of Native American history have been nationally and tribally recognized; and

WHEREAS, As an award winning artist, author, sculptor and explorer with entries in over 150 public and private shows, several of Dennis' sculptures and paintings are on permanent display across the country, including the "Captain George Wellington Street" statute near Navy Pier and at the Art Institute of Chicago where three of his pieces were on display at the "Fiber in Art Museums" Exhibit in 1999; and

WHEREAS, Dennis was also a leader in organizations such as the Great Lakes Trail Marker Tree Society and was dedicated to sharing his knowledge and passion with others through lectures, presentations, and community outreach efforts; and

WHEREAS, Dennis' commitment to preserving Native American culture was exemplified by his involvement in the installation of a 6-foot-tall bronze sculpture of a trail marker tree in Antioch's downtown area, as well as his contributions to The Grove in Glenview, where his 16-foot-tall steel-and-resin sculpture of a trail marker tree remains on permanent display; and

WHEREAS, As a symbol of their gratitude for Dennis' contributions to preserving their cultural heritage, an Ojibwe elder bestowed upon him the name "Mayaagaabaw," meaning "he stands foremost among others" as he was foremost in preserving this history and passing it on to the next generations to keep alive; and

WHEREAS, As Dennis would say, "Don't be afraid of doing something, be afraid of never doing anything"; and

WHEREAS, Dennis leaves to cherish their memories of him: his wife, Gail Spreen-Downes; sister Maryann and brothers Louis, Harrold, and Patrick; cousins; nieces; nephews; and great-nieces and great-nephews; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, That the City of Chicago honors the memory of Dennis Downes and extends its deepest condolences to his family, friends, and all those whose lives he touched

Section 1. Pursuant to Section 2-8-040 of the Municipal Code of Chicago, which allows erection of honorary street name designations, the Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Transportation shall take the necessary action for standardization of North McClurg Ct, between East Grand Avenue and East Illinois Street as "Honorary Dennis Downes Way." Section 2. This ordinance shall take effect upon its passage and publication.



BRIAN HOPKINS
Alderman, 2nd Ward

BIOGRAPHY

Dennis Michael Two-Spears Mayaagaabow Downes

Born May 16, 1951 in Chicago, IL to parents Mary Berriochoa and Mathew Downes. Leaving his wife, Gail Spreen-Downes, sister Maryann and brothers Louis, Harrold, and Patrick, numerous beloved cousins, nieces, nephews, great-nieces and great-nephews, Dennis passed away February 25th 2024, peacefully in his sleep. Love of his life and wife of 23 years Gail Spreen-Downes was beside him in his home overlooking Channel Lake in Antioch IL with his treasured nature an arm's length away and bald eagles flying overhead.

Dennis was a husband, brother, cousin, uncle, friend, and inspiration to many. An award-winning artist & author, a hunter, sculptor, actor, lecturer, boat enthusiast, architect of Barbarian Shelter/Studio North on a remote island in the Wilderness Coast of Ontario Canada, authenticator and educator of the Native American Trail Marker Trees across North America, his legacy is immeasurable. He was often recognized for his artistic accomplishments; sales of his artwork funded his field research, resulting in the publication of his book, Native American Trail Marker Trees; Marking the Paths Through the Wilderness, foreword by Janet Davies, 2011.

Recognized Nationally by the Daughters of the American Revolution with an honorarium for an 18-minute presentation to the American Indian Committee documenting the past 100 years and proving the DAR's involvement with helping to save the Trail Marker

Trees. He is the recipient of countless accolades, awards and proclamations with the most recent from The Explorers Club of New York who are also going to start the "Dennis Downes American Wilderness Grant".

A long-standing member of the Blackhawk Chapter of the Antique Boat Society, he proudly owned and lovingly restored two wood boats, "The Phantom Chief" and "Thundercloud." He considered them ongoing art projects in yet another medium. Conducting countless presentations including Navy Pier Chicago IL Gala of the Arts, Dennis often paid homage to Captain George Wellington "Cap" Streeter, Streeterville's namesake. His 8-foot bronze sculpture located on the corner of McClurg Ct. and Grand Ave. in the heart of the Streeterville neighborhood was commissioned by Golub & Co, sculpted by Dennis to commemorate the historical significance of Cap Streeter for all time. Dennis and Gail produced the documentary film "The History of South Streeterville" which premiered in 2022 and will be kept with the Chicago History Museum.

After the Lake County Discovery Museum was home to his 16-foot Trail Marker Tree for several years, the sculpture was permanently installed at The Grove in Glenview IL. In his early twenties, Dennis resided at The Grove before it was turned into a landmark. How amazing that decades later he would be honored to present his body of work at such a special and formative place. Each year Dennis contributed part of the proceeds of his Grove Solo Show back to The Grove to help continue its preservation. He held 20 three-day solo shows, including his 150th Anniversary Public Show at The Grove from 2000 to 2022.

In 2009 for the third year in a row he was honored to receive the award for his artwork at the Festival of the Master's a national competition hosted by Amdur Productions. In 2010 his sculpture "Trail Marker Tree" was accepted into the Lakefront Sculpture Exhibition in Chicago IL receiving an honorarium. His own original high relief paper making technique was featured on HGTV, his Dog Pony pieces are a part of the series that was created for the show "That's Clever" that aired nationally.

There were countless interviews from WGN/Rich King, ABC 7, Fox 32 News teams, Chicago Tonight with Geoffrey Baer, book signings & lectures throughout the USA.

In 2013 Dennis and several of his paintings had cameos in the film "23 Blast" which won the Audience Choice Award at the Heartland Film Festival and was produced by Gary Donatelli.

Dennis was an inspiration to his lifelong friend & author James Pomerantz, who used Dennis' portrait for the cover of his novel Ghost Bandit.

"Tree Hunter: Portrait of an American Artist" the Documentary on Dennis Produced by Director Lesley Topping and Co-Produced by another close lifelong friend, Gary Donatelli is nearing completion and release.

Dennis resided in Antioch IL from 1985-2024.

Antioch IL Main Street is now home to his 6-foot bronze Trail Marker Tree sculpture. An Installation and Dedication was held in 2018. The Antioch Garden Club designed and maintains the landscaping surrounding the sculpture. A stewardship of care and enduring legacy of Dennis' work.

He was Keynote speaker at the Native American Artisan Craft Fair-a 3 day event honoring Native American Heritage Month. Numerous native tribes of the Great Lakes Region participated.

Most recently Dennis and Gail traveled to the Basque Country in northern Spain as he has always celebrated his Basque heritage from his mother's side of the family (Berriochoa). Dennis' ancestor was Saint Valentin-Berrio-Ochoa Born 2/14/1827 Beheaded in Vietnam for refusing to renounce Jesus- died 11/1/1861 Canonized 1988 by Pope John Paul II. Dennis was treated like royalty in the town of Elorrio, where St. Valentin was from, during a dedication held for the installation of Dennis' high relief bronze of St. Valentin in the Basque Museum in Boise Idaho.

In August 2016- An Ojibew Elder bestowed upon Dennis his Indian name "Mayaagaabaw" translation: He Stands Foremost Amongst Others. Truly encapsulating all that is Dennis Downes

Although Dennis was diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer in 2016, he always persevered through adversity and never complained. Through his many treatments he continued his work, lectures and events, never flagging or even considering slowing down until his stroke in January 2024. He lived with dignity and purpose as his North Star.

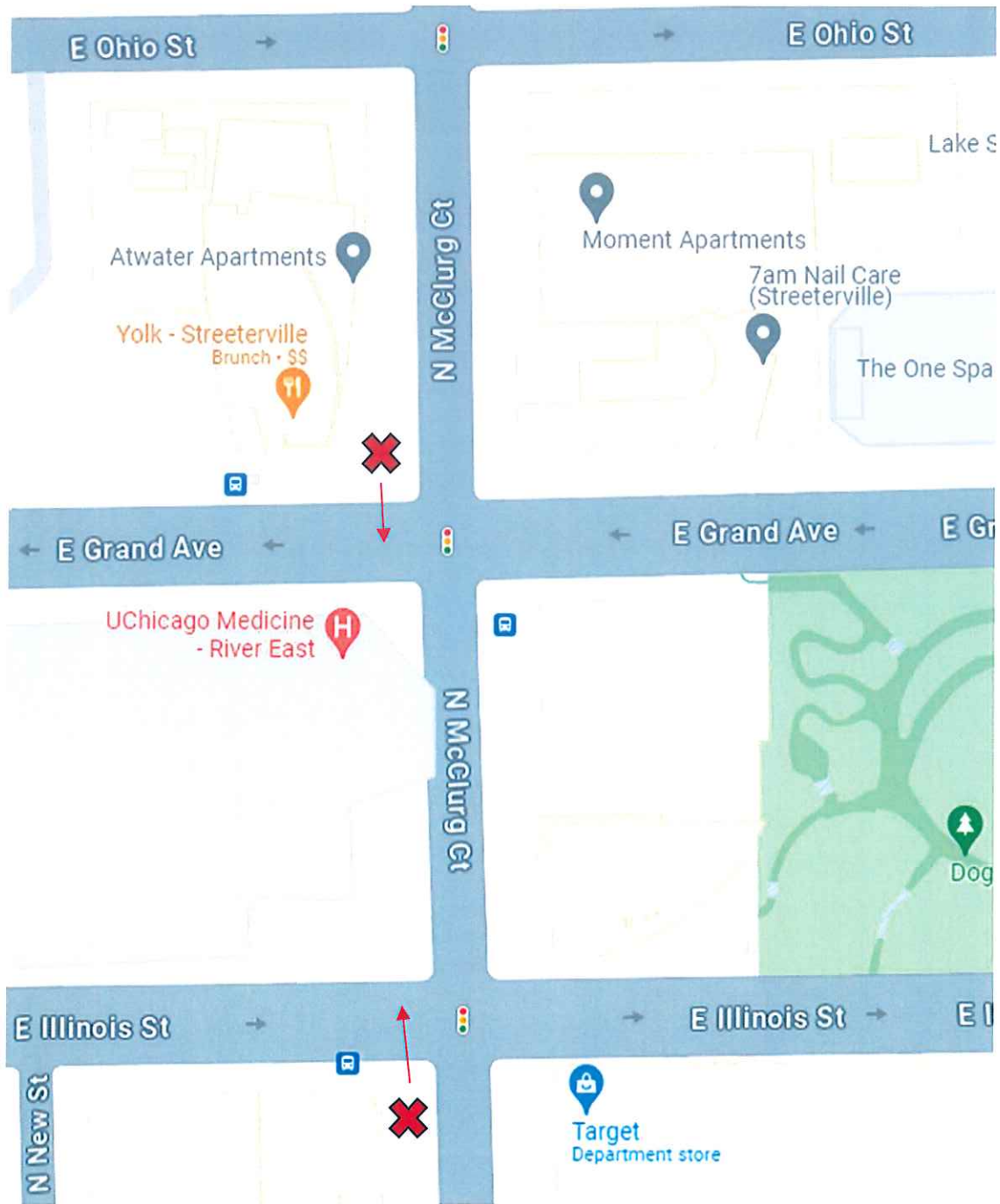
Dennis will always be remembered for being "The Trail Marker Tree Guy" as he brought the history of the Trail Marker Trees to the forefront ensuring this important piece of Native American history will never be forgotten.

One of Dennis favorite sayings that he wrote on a white paper plate and hung on his swinging door reads, "Don't be afraid of doing something, be afraid of never doing anything" ~2014

REASONS FOR HONORING

Dennis Downes was an author, artist, and a pillar of the Streeterville community, creating Captain George "Cap" Wellington Streeter sculpture. This street sign will be a token of our community's gratitude for his extraordinary life.

MAP



June 13, 2024

Office of Budget and Management

121 N. LaSalle, Room 604

Chicago, IL 60602

To Whom It May Concern:

I, Brian Hopkins, Alderman of the 2nd Ward, hereby authorize the Office of Budget Management to withdraw the funds associated with the cost of installation for this honorary street designation for Dennis Downes from my:

X Ward's aldermanic expense allowance upon passage of this honorary street designation ordinance, pursuant to Section 2-8-040 of the Chicago Municipal Code.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian Hopkins".

BRIAN HOPKINS
Alderman, 2nd Ward