

In 2002, The Wednesday Journal did a wonderful commemorative section honoring its centennial. It was entitled "Oak Park Stories 100 Years of Big News in a Small Town." Excerpts of articles from that edition are presented here, with permission from The Wednesday Journal.



A fitting memorial for gun victim Jim Piszczor

By KEN TRAINOR

Not many people remember the name James Piszczor. Most people, however, know that Oak Park banned handguns in 1984, and the controversial handgun ban is a memorial to James Piszczor.

Piszczor, 34, an attorney, was killed along with Judge Henry Gentile on Oct. 21, 1983 in a courtroom at the Daley Center. An ex-Chicago policeman named Hutchie Moore, seated in a wheelchair, smuggled a snubnosed revolver into the courtroom beneath a blanket. During a post-divorce proceeding, he pulled out the gun and shot both the judge and Piszczor, who was representing Moore's ex-wife. Both men were killed.

Piszczor, a partner with the law firm Vinon, Fuchs, Temple and Berman, was married and had two small children. His wife, Maureen, called for handgun control, and her cause was taken up by friends and community members, who formed the Oak Park Citizens Committee for Handgun Control, led by fellow Ascension parishioner Chris Walsh. They pushed for the Oak Park Village Board of Trustees to pass a handgun ban ordinance.

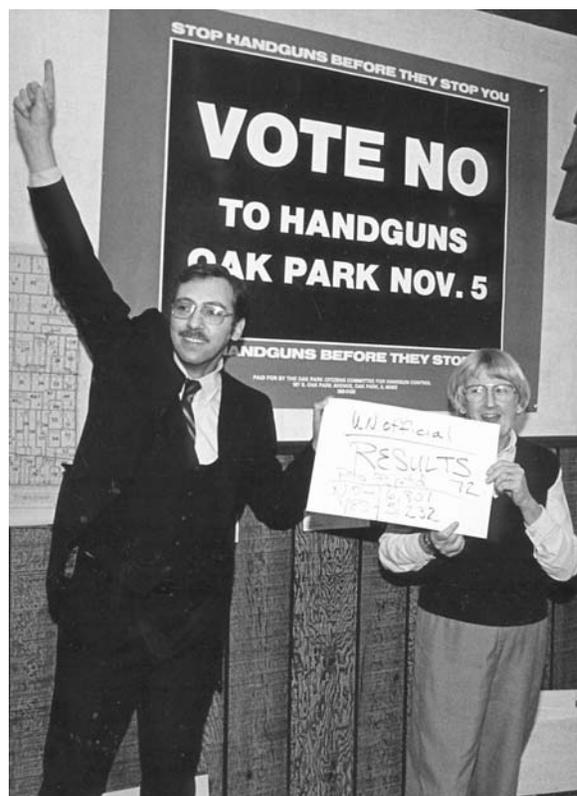
As you might imagine, this proposal aroused fierce opposition, and after months of heated debate, the board passed a ban in April of 1984. It took effect in October of '84, close to the anniversary of Piszczor's death. The Oak Park Freedom Committee formed in opposition and succeeded in getting an advisory referendum on the ballot in November of 1985. Just before the Nov. 5 vote, Maureen Piszczor published an appeal to her fellow voters, saying, "I learned a lot from my husband. He never walked away from a problem that he could possibly do something about. I could have walked away from the handgun issue. It certainly would have been easier. But I ask myself what kind of meaning my life would have if I continued to ignore the slaughter of fathers, husbands and children each year with handguns.

"People tell me that Oak Park's handgun ban wouldn't have saved my husband. They miss the point. ... We don't know whose life could be saved by our handgun ban. It could be you. It could be me. It could be our children. Why take that chance?

"Say NO to this domestic arms race—this proliferation of handguns in our society. We do not have to accept this violence. ... We, as a community, can do something to change and stem the rising tide of violence. And we did. Let's keep at it. Let's keep our ban."

And we did. The referendum supported the ban, 8,031 to 6,368. Three previous communities had seen their handgun bans defeated at the polls. Oak Park's was the first in the country to be upheld.

Not a bad memorial, all things considered.



A handgun-free zone: Led by Chris Walsh, left, the Oak Park Citizens Committee for Handgun Control made the handgun ban stick by winning the Nov. 5, 1985 referendum, 8,031 to 6,368.