250# Clock Tower (Script by Peggy Macdonald)

Like something from the 1980s film classic “Back to the Future,” the clock tower has been a constant in downtown life since Gainesville was new. The clock tower made its debut in 1885, when the second Alachua County Court House was constructed. The red brick courthouse functioned as a community center. The Seth Thomas clock bell was once connected to Gainesville’s fire alarm system. Before the courthouse was demolished in 1961, the tower clock’s chime could be heard from downtown Gainesville all the way to 13th Street, according to Ted Crom, whose family name is synonymous with the clock tower.

Gainesville was much smaller and quieter then, recalled Crom, whose father Theodore Crom rescued the tower clock parts from the junkyard after the courthouse was taken down. Theodore did the brunt of the mechanical work to repair the Seth Thomas clock, but the whole Crom family played a role in its restoration.

The Crom family had the weights cast at the Maddox Foundry and Machine Works in Archer. Ted and Gary’s brother, Brady painted the clock. Ted helped with the machine work, repairing or replacing missing pieces. On a trip through Georgia, Theodore and Gary found two pieces that were needed to regulate the time before the tower clock was electrified. Theodore put all the pieces together to bring the tower clock back to life.

In 1983, the restored clock was installed in a new brick tower at the corner of Northeast First Street and University Avenue, across the street from its original location at the Courthouse Square. Jean Chalmers, who was mayor-commissioner at the time the clock tower was completed, thanked the Crom family for restoring the clock and former mayor-commissioner Gary Junior for spearheading the clock tower project. Today the clock tower is one of the iconic symbols of downtown Gainesville.

Ted Crom’s work can also be seen scattered across Gainesville. He created “Luna,” the man-in-the-moon sculpture that is now located by Liquid Ginger in the Sun Center. His work has been featured in three major Hollywood films, including “Forrest Gump,” for which he made the bench Forrest sat on while he told his life story. Crom also built sets, walls, art and props for the films “Under Siege” and “The Truman Show.” He continues to make large works of public art in his Cross Creek studio.

In 2013, the City of Gainesville declared August 10th Ted Crom Day. The date was chosen to pay tribute not only to the Crom children’s father, but also to their mother, Wynona (“Nonie”), whose birthday is August 10th. Theodore and Nonie met at Glen Springs, where Theodore was a diving clown and Wynona was a mermaid. Today, brothers Gary and Ted are keeping the Crom family legacy alive.

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