

Egg symbolic of town's niche

By TIM ASHLEY
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It has caused more than a few puzzled looks and it causes some to stop their vehicles, get out and snap a few shots with a camera. This is something to get on film to prove that, yes, it does exist.

Since 1946, on the southwest corner of Main and Morgan streets in Mentone, has sat a 3,000 pound concrete egg. The oval white painted egg has an outline of the state of Indiana and inside the outline are the words "The Egg Basket of the Midwest, with, of course, a basket full of eggs above the phrase.

Mentone, as well as Kosciusko County, is noted for poultry production. The county ranked first in the state in poultry production in 1983, according to a paper written by William A. Henthorn and Charles D. Smith describing the egg and the meaning behind it. Although poultry production in the area is generally not what it used to be, Mentone still has an annual Egg Festival, sponsored by the chamber of commerce.

Main Street in Mentone is also SR 25, thereby a lot of out of town vehicles pass through the town daily. The huge egg sits next to the parking lot of Lake City Bank. Karen Francis, vice president and regional manager for Lake City Bank, said it is not unusual for people to stop to get a photo of the egg.

"We have a lot of people get their photo taken with the egg," she said. "One of us at the bank

will go out and take the picture because everybody wants to be in it." Francis is also the treasurer for the Mentone Chamber of Commerce.

Occasionally, the bank will receive a phone call from someone who simply doesn't believe the egg exists. Francis specifically recalled an area radio station wanting a photo as proof positive. She keeps a stash of photos for even more proof.

She also noted the egg is listed as the point of interest for Indiana on a map of the United States found in the Denver, Colo., airport. "I thought it was interesting they would list the egg for the entire state of Indiana," she said.

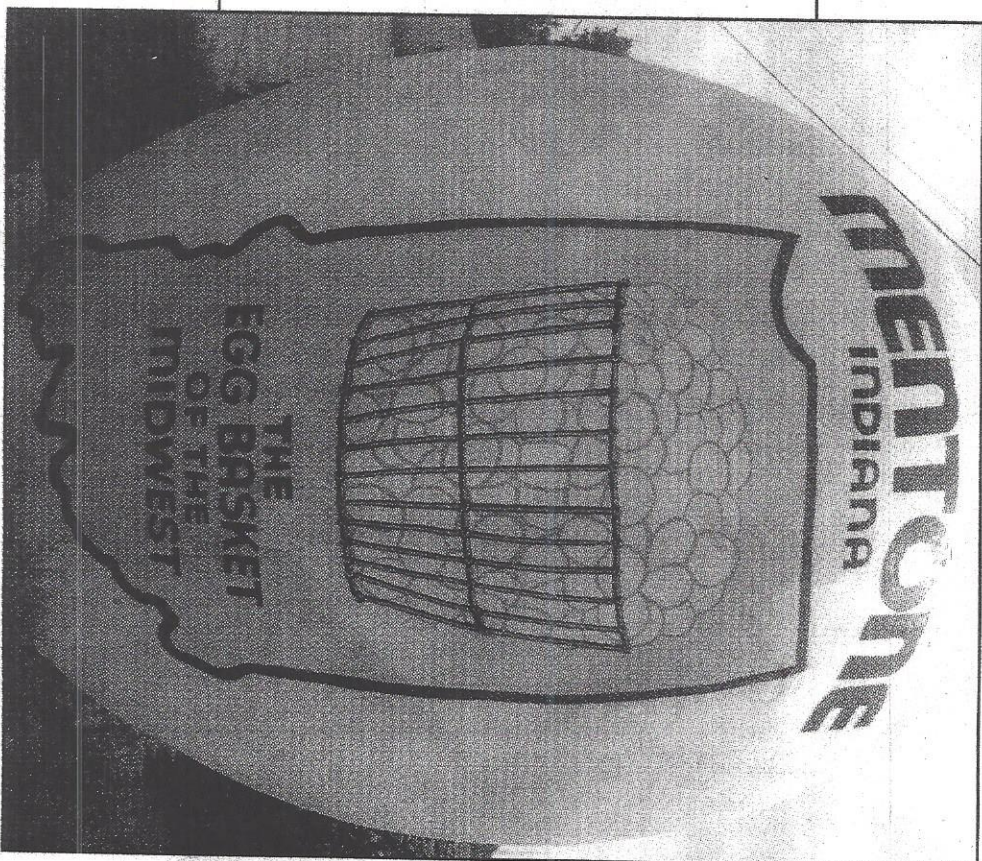
The bank became associated with the egg in 1983. "When we purchased the land for the bank in 1983, we inherited the egg," Francis said. "It was a Co-Op building then."

But the history of the egg dates back to 1946 when it was first built. Ed Ward, then the manager of the Northern Indiana Co-Op Association, and some of the egg farmers in the area wanted a unique way to promote the Egg Festival that year. The festival was first held in 1936.

Hugh Rickel of nearby Pales-tine designed and built the egg. It was built in a building near the northwest corner of Main and Morgan. Steel rods were wired together and then welded for extra strength, making a frame for the egg. Two coats of concrete plaster were then placed over the frame, followed by a coat of finish plaster. Harry

CONCRETE MAR-

VEL.—A 3,000 pound concrete egg is not something observed on a daily basis. But one can be found on the southwest corner of Main and Morgan streets in Mentone. (Photo by Tim Ashley)



Meredith painted and lettered the egg.

It took 12 men to load the egg on a truck to be taken to the courthouse lawn in Warsaw. For about two weeks, it stood as an advertisement for the Egg Festival. Just a few days prior to the start of the 1946 Egg Festival, the egg was returned to Mentone

and placed where it stands today. The Co-Op originally donated the land where the egg sits.

Time and the elements have taken a toll on the egg. Maintenance is performed as needed, Francis said. For example, it was repainted before the start of this year's Egg Festival. And

snow piling on top of the egg in the winter months caused the plaster to crack, thereby requiring some touching up.

The egg still stands, not only as a way to promote the Egg Festival, but as a reminder of the importance of poultry production in Kosciusko County