

Mentone



Jason Z. Cohen/The Journal Gazette

This 13-foot-tall cement egg is a Mentone landmark. It was built 50 years ago for the town's egg show, which has grown into the annual Mentone Egg Festival.

Eggstraordinary town scrambles for a landmark

By Jason Z. Cohen
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MENTONE — A giant egg is whisking up its share of controversy in western Kosciusko County.

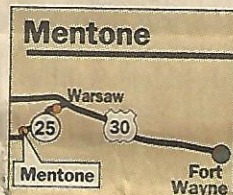
Mentone officials, using a state development grant, want to build a new water tower as part of the town's \$1.4 million water system expansion.

But they want to build the tower in the shape of a giant egg.

At first, the proposal met with disapproval from the state. But the state has since deferred, as long as the additional cost of building an egg-shaped tower is borne by private donations.

The controversy over the egg-shaped tower has gained national exposure for Mentone, a farming community of 912 people. Stories have appeared in national newspapers and on television, said Rita Price, president of the Mentone Chamber of Commerce.

"We've always had fun with the egg theme, and now it's getting us national attention," Price said. Other residents are not so



thrilled.
"I think it's a waste of money," said Jay Woodruff, co-owner of Frank and Jerry's Market, the town's only grocery. "I figure we've got other things we could use the money for other than that."

But Price said the town has secured commitments for private donations to cover the additional cost, estimated at \$50,000. It is now seeking bids for the project. The rest of the water system project will be financed by the state.

Mentone and the egg have for many years shared destinies. Train cars filled with eggs departed from the town in its early days, bound for points east.

More recently, eggs have been processed in Mentone by Midwest Poultry Services, a company that buys eggs whole, breaks them, and sells the parts. Its primary customers are bakeries. The company employs 320 people, generating annual sales of more than \$25 million.

Built along the Nickel Plate Railroad, Mentone has always been an agricultural town. However, agriculture was not the profession chosen by the man who has become Mentone's most famous native. Lawrence D. Bell, founder of Bell Aircraft Co., was born in 1894 in Mentone.

In 1907, Bell and his family moved to California, where he attended air shows and started working as an aeronautical engineer.

In 1928, he joined Consolidated Aircraft, in Buffalo, N.Y. He formed his own company when Consolidated moved its headquarters in 1935.

The company he founded achieved many of aviation's firsts: It built the first supersonic aircraft, the first commercial helicopter and the first jet-powered fighter built in the United States. Bell Aircraft went on to become the nation's leading manufacturer of helicopters.

A military helicopter built by his company now rests outside the Lawrence D. Bell Aircraft Museum in Mentone. Open Sundays from June to September, the museum traces the history of aviation. It sits on the southwest side of town in an open field bordering a residential area.

Closer to the heart of the town, Main Street is usually busy with people going to the post office, the Pill Box Pharmacy or the Valley Furnishings store — even on a cold January afternoon.

Main Street helps carry traffic from Warsaw and other eastern communities to Rochester and Logansport.

Teel's Restaurant, though closed after 2 p.m. weekdays, is a popular spot for Mentone residents and people passing through town.

And yes, they do serve eggs.

Profile: Mentone

Population: 912

Founded: 1882 by Albert Tucker

Government: Town council

Main commercial businesses: Midwest Poultry Services, 320; Kralis Brothers Foods, 170; Mid-West Spring, 100; Winona Corp., 35.

"Our Towns" is a continuing series focusing on northeast Indiana and northwest Ohio. It appears in The Journal Gazette each Sunday.