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Dodge City Trail of Fame to be dedicated in May; Dennis Weaver to appear Special to the Globe

The Trail of Fame committee of Downtown Dodge, Inc. is well on the way toward the installation and dedication of a self-guided historical walking tour of Dodge City, which will include sidewalk medallions and statuary along a route through the historic downtown area. The newly restored Santa Fe Depot, sundial park and railroad caboose will be at the east end of the trail, and the Convention and Visitors Bureau and Boot Hill Museum on the west.

The inauguration of the "Trail of Fame" will be Saturday, May 24, and Sunday, May 25, during the Kansas Cowboy Symposium in Dodge City. A formal reception and black-tie dinner will be held Saturday evening along with a luncheon on Sunday and dedication of the trail. Renowned actor and Hollywood celebrity Dennis Weaver, who portrayed Chester Goode in the original "Gunsmoke" television production, will be in Dodge City to inaugurate the trail. Weaver will also be honored with a sidewalk medallion dedicated during the Sunday ceremony and will speak in support of alternative energy sources and "Ecolonomics".

Plans call for 18-inch bronze sidewalk medallions commemorating both Dodge City's historical characters and celebrities such as Weaver who have played real or fictional Dodge Citizens. The first 10 honorees will be in place for the dedication and include the likes of historical characters Wyatt Earp, John "Doc" Holliday, Bartholomew "Bat" Masterson, Chalkley Beeson, Charles Rath, Brig. Gen. George Armstrong Custer and "Big Nose Kate" Elder. The initial group of celebrities includes Henry Fonda and Errol Flynn, as well as Weaver. More medallions are planned for later this year. There is also a provision for engraved bricks to be laid along the trail to commemorate other important members of the Dodge City community over the years.

"The Trail of Fame committee includes a broad cross-section of local business people and concerned citizens," Jim Johnson, Trail of Fame committee chair, said.

"These people have worked hard and sacrificed much to bring this quality attraction to fruition," he added.

Johnson indicated that the project began as a spin-off idea of the Destination Depot project.

"Something was needed to pull the downtown attractions and rich Dodge City history together," he said. "Financing began with a Kansas Department of Commerce & Housing Attractions Development Grant obtained by Downtown Dodge, Inc." said Johnson. "The grant will cover most of the new landscaping

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around the downtown area and a few items needed for the Trail of Fame, but we wanted to allow local businesses and individuals to be a part of this project."

He went on to say that anyone wishing to be involved with sponsoring part of the trail would be very welcome.

Johnson noted that one of the cornerstones of project will be an 8-foot bronze statue of Wyatt Earp by Oklahoma sculptor Mary Spurgeon.

"The committee viewed a 14-inch-tall clay 'marquette' of the statue last December and was stunned by its quality and historical accuracy," he said.

In addition to the 8-foot statue to be located along the route, a limited edition of 14-inch copies of the statues will be available for sale in order to help support the project, some of which have already been sold, indicating that interest is already high among the public to support the project.

"Dodge City has a dynamic and rich history which is the envy of most other towns," Johnson said. "It's time for us to present this heritage to the world in a way we can be proud of, and in a way which strongly supports our community."

Sponsorships are sought for the statue, medallions and the bricks. Those interested may contact the Trail of Fame, PO Box 1243, Dodge City, KS 67801.

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