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Progress continues on Trail of Fame

By Charlene Scott
Dodge City Daily Globe

Excitement is building as the Trail of Fame in Dodge City progresses under the watchful eyes of Jim and Carolyn Johnson of the Dodge City Trail of Fame.

"The next statue that will be designed will be that of Bat Masterson," said Carolyn, who traveled recently to Gate, Okla., to view the 9-foot Wyatt Earp statue sculpted by Oklahoma artist Mary Spurgeon.

Earp's statue has been sent to a foundry in Colorado to be cast in bronze and probably will be installed at a special ceremony in September at the northeast corner of Wyatt Earp and Central Avenue in Dodge City.

"Oh, my goodness, it's exciting," said Carolyn. "We are coordinating with the city public works department for the Wyatt Earp statue's installation. The site already has been approved by the city of Dodge City."

Also in the works is the installation of several more 24-inch sidewalk medallions along the Trail of Fame, which will wind through Dodge City's historic district in the downtown area. The medallions eventually will cover most of the district.

"JAG Construction Company has donated in kind to install the medallions in the sidewalk," Jim explained. "We are working to make sure they go in the right spots. There are a lot of storage vaults and covered-over staircases under the sidewalks, so we have to be careful where we dig to place the medallions."

Actor Dennis Weaver -- who starred as "Chester" in TV's longest running series, "Gunsmoke" -- became the first person to be inducted into the Dodge City Trail of Fame last year. Weaver was honored with a 24-inch sidewalk medallion during ceremonies near "El Capitan," the statue of the longhorn steer, in downtown Dodge City.

"We have eight more medallions ready to go along the Trail of Fame, and we hope by June or July to have a dedication of some of them," Jim said. "Two recent medallion sponsors are the High Plains Journal and Warehouse City U-Store-It."

"We currently are contacting some family members, such as 'Chalkley' Beeson's great-grandson, to see if they can attend the dedication."

Beeson was the original owner of the Long Branch Saloon and one of the founding fathers of Dodge City.

Also honored with a medallion will be Charles Rath, an early

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trader and also a founding father.

"Rath established a general store and sold farming equipment to farmers and gun powder to buffalo hunters," Jim said. "He bought the hides and bones from the hunters and resold them. He also had a trading post with Native Americans."

Medallions also have been created to honor Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson, Doc Holliday, "Big Nose" Kate and Gen. George Armstrong Custer.

Why Custer?

"He was involved in early Dodge City history," Jim answered. "His division of the Army cut the wagon road from Fort Dodge to Camp Supply, a fort in northwestern Oklahoma."

Other medallions -- there will be at least 80 -- will honor actors Henry Fonda, who starred as Wyatt Earp in the movie "My Darling Clementine," and Errol Flynn, who appeared in the movie "Dodge City," as well as Dodge City lawmen Bill Tilghman, Pat Sughrue and Charlie Bassett.

"Those are the kind of people we want to honor: people who did something for Dodge City," Jim said. "We also will have medallions for James Arness, Amanda Blake, Ken Curtis, Milburn Stone and Buck Taylor of TV's 'Gunsmoke' series."

Taylor, a Western and cowboy artist and movie actor who is best known for his long-running role on "Gunsmoke," will be honored at a black tie dinner and reception Aug. 6 at the Dodge City Santa Fe Depot theater.

Taylor will be invested with a medallion on the Trail of Fame the following day, and Landmark National Bank will host him as its visiting artist during Dodge City Days.

Besides the medallions, the Trail of Fame Committee has sold 10 of the 14-inch tall exact replicas of the 9-foot Wyatt Earp statue that will be installed on the Trail of Fame, as well as 5 of 50 commemorative guns that are for sale.

"Creation of the medallions and the statues will be ongoing," Carolyn said. "The statues and guns both sell for \$3,500, and each medallion costs \$2,000. The sale of these items and medallion sponsorships finances the Dodge City Trail of Fame."

Her husband added: "There is international interest in the gun. We are advertising in several firearm and Western history magazines, and two or three of them are sending writers to do articles about the Trail of Fame and the gun in June or July."

The commemorative gun is a gold-plated replica of Wyatt Earp's 1873 Colt Army Single Action revolver with inlays of silver, Earp's autograph on the barrel and engraved walnut grips. The gun comes in a carved oak display case.

"This year we will apply again for a grant from the Kansas Department of Commerce's Travel and Tourism Division," Jim said. "Two years ago, we received a grant of \$100,000 to help kick off the Trail of Fame."

A portion of the new grant may help finance the purchase of several of artist Stan Herd's painted metal panels recently obtained by the city of Dodge City. The panels formerly hung on the High Plains Dressed Beef building on East Trail Street.

"Several groups, including the Downtown Revitalization Committee and the Dodge City Area Arts Council, also have been involved with saving the panels," Jim explained. "They were made available for a song, and we hope to install them somewhere in the downtown historic district.

"The Trail of Fame also is deeply involved with the effort to revitalize downtown Dodge City," he added. "The city commission has commissioned the group Gossell and Livingston to build a master plan for the development of the historic district."

It was only a year ago that the Trail of Fame emerged from the drawing board and the imaginations of members of the Trail of Fame Committee.

"What the Trail of Fame is doing is showcasing historic old Dodge City," Jim said. "A year ago, we didn't have anything, and in a year's time we have come to all of this: the statues of Wyatt Earp, the medallions and the commemorative guns. A lot of really good people have been involved to make this possible."

CUTLINES:

Jim Johnson, who with his wife, Carolyn, is a member of the Dodge City Trail of Fame, Inc., shows off the statue of Wyatt Earp and a commemorative gun that are for sale to help finance the Trail of Fame project.

Charlene Scott/Daily Globe

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