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Wyatt Earp returns

Statue immortalizes famous Dodge City lawman

By Charlene Scott
Dodge City Daily Globe



Carolyn Johnson of the Dodge City Trail of Fame takes a peek at the newly-finished, 500-pound statue of Wyatt Earp that will be installed Nov. 12 at the corner of Wyatt Earp Boulevard and Central Avenue.

Charlene Scott

Wyatt Earp is back in town and this time, he's here to stay.

An eight-foot statue of Dodge City's most famous lawman has arrived in Dodge City and is being kept under wraps at an undisclosed location until the unveiling on Friday, Nov. 12.

Designed and created by Oklahoma artist Mary Spurgeon, the statue will be installed at the corner of Wyatt Earp and Central Avenue, the first to be erected downtown along the Dodge City Trail of Fame walking trail.

Trail of Fame committee members headed by Jim and Carolyn Johnson were privileged to have had a peek at the bronze sculpture, transported to Dodge City from a Colorado foundry by Mary and her daughter Linda Spurgeon.

"Everybody is so excited; they think it's wonderful," said Carolyn, as she examined the more than 500-pound statue reclining on the floor in the back of Linda's trailer.

His head propped up on a pillow, his arms strapped down and one foot encased in foam, Earp the statue looked a bit uncomfortable in his prone position, but his eye was fixed and his hand steady as he gripped his western hat.

"Look at that hat," Jim said, removing his own cap and swinging it to his side just as Earp the statue swings his hat. "Mary got that hat just right. It looks as if he just took it off."

With Earp's hat flopped on its side since the statue was face down, Carolyn noticed something else clever about it.

"Mary put a headband in the hat," Carolyn pointed out. "And she has included a ribbon to hold the headband together."

The sculptor's attention to detail is what endeared Mary to the foundry workers, her daughter Linda said.

"The workmen at the foundry loved my mother," she declared. "She is so meticulous in detail, and people appreciate that. She put tiny chains on Wyatt's watch fob for the smaller statues, but

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we had to go to a hardware store to find large chains for the big statue. And the foundry had to weld those chains down to keep them from clanking in the Kansas wind and ruining the patina."



A 14-inch replica of the Wyatt Earp statue.

Charlene Scott

And he's a mighty handsome fellow, that Wyatt Earp statue is, both Linda and Carolyn agreed.

"When you see his face, it's just fantastic," Linda said. "He's very dashing, isn't he? His eyes depend on the shadows around him. It's just awesome."

Linda's granddaughter and Mary's great-granddaughter Lindee, 5, can take some of the credit for the statue's good looks. Lindee and her younger brother T.W., 4, helped Mary to slab on the clay to form the statue's face.

"Lindee went with us to the foundry, and I told her to look at the face," Linda said. "When she saw it, she stood there and giggled and giggled."

The statue will be erected just in time for the 50th year anniversary next year of the television show "Gunsmoke," which celebrated the wicked and wild Dodge City that Wyatt Earp knew so well.

"People all around the world know who Wyatt Earp is," Jim said. "When I was in London in '92, people there knew more about Dodge City history than some of the locals here do."

Jim hopes the statue will kindle local interest in Dodge City's rich history. And since the statue isn't paid for yet, he has high hopes that area residents will reach into their pockets to contribute to the tribute to the famous lawman.

"If everyone in Dodge City would donate just one dollar, we would have enough to finish paying for the statue," Jim said. "We are trying to preserve Dodge City's history. That's what the Trail of Fame is all about."

A reception to thank supporters of the Trail of Fame will be held the day of the statue's installation. Mary will attend the reception to take a well-deserved bow for her finished work of art.

Mary also sculpted a 14-inch bronze statue of Wyatt Earp that has been reproduced to sell. Proceeds are helping to finance the larger statue.

"The whole committee is really happy," Carolyn said. "And Mary is tickled with it. She was at the foundry for three days to help them with the colors for the patina."

"Mother is really pleased with how the patina turned out," Linda added. "The gun and the belt are different colors and the frock coat is black."

"This is the largest statue my mother has ever done," Linda said. "It's been an odyssey for mother, who always has welcomed adventure in her life."

Contributions to the Trail of Fame can be sent to the Johnsons at P.O. Box 1243, Dodge City, KS 67801.

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