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Wyatt Earp statue to be unveiled on Friday

By Charlene Scott
Dodge City Daily Globe



Jim Johnson, director of the Dodge City Trail of Fame, stands at the site where the long-awaited new statue of Wyatt Earp will be unveiled Friday afternoon at the corner of Wyatt Earp Boulevard and Central Avenue.

Charlene Scott

statue.

Speakers at the unveiling will include Dodge City Mayor Mark Pingsterhaus and Ford County Commissioner Kim Goodnight. Spurgeon will be the guest of honor at an invitation-only Trail of Fame reception Friday from 5 to 7 p.m. in the lobby of the Santa Fe Depot.

Also on hand at the ceremony will be Spurgeon's daughter, Linda Spurgeon, who accompanied her mother to bring the giant statue back in a cargo trailer from Colorado, where it was cast in bronze at Art Castings of Colorado in Loveland.

Spurgeon used the lost wax process to create her portrayal of Wyatt Earp, which took the entire year to complete. She researched Western books about gunfighters to find photos of Wyatt and pictures of his 18" gun so that her rendition of Earp would be accurate.

Her statue shows a mustached Wyatt Earp in full stride, with his coat blowing behind him in the breeze. Hat in one hand, his other hand grasps his "Buntline Special" long-barreled gun.

"From the pictures of Wyatt Earp, he had a handsome, fascinating face and a gambler's hands, with slim, slender

After long months of waiting, the dedication ceremony and the unveiling of the eight-foot statue of famed lawman Wyatt Earp finally will take place on the Trail of Fame in Dodge City Friday at 5 p.m.

The statue will greet passersby at the corner of Wyatt Earp Boulevard and Central Avenue. It will be erected on a base similar to the one on which stands "El Capitan," the longhorn steer that symbolizes Dodge City's wild frontier days of 100 years ago and the beef-packing industry of the area today.

Sculptor Mary Spurgeon of Gate, Oklahoma will be on hand to participate in the unveiling of the statue to which she has devoted her life this past year. Spurgeon and Jim Coffin of JAG Construction will pull the cord to unveil the

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USA Weekend

fingers that looked flexible," said Spurgeon, whose sculptures and paintings are well known in the southwest.

The large sculpture of Wyatt Earp has a western or what is described as a "French patina," a darker golden brown. Approximately 40 smaller Wyatt Earp statues - 14" tall - and several replicas of his pistol are being created to sell to finance the cost of the larger sculpture.

"JAG Construction Company built the base for the statue, and a representative from the foundry, Tony Workman, is assisting with the installation," explained Jim Johnson, co-director with his wife, Carolyn, of the Dodge City Trail of Fame committee.

"The City engineer also has been involved in coordinating the installation because of the gas and water lines, and electrical and telephone lines as well."

The Trail of Fame - a walking tour of downtown Dodge City - also includes in-ground medallions dedicated to famous cowboys, lawmen, pioneers and actors who have portrayed those personalities. Other larger-than-life statues of those well-known lawmen, cowboys and pioneers eventually will be placed along the trail.

"We have 10 medallions that have been installed along Gunsmoke and Front Streets, and a Bat Masterson medallion has been placed in the parking lot of Bank of America," said Carolyn, Jim's wife.

"Bat Masterson's home once sat at that location, and that's why we put the medallion there," she explained. "The High Plains Journal has sponsored a Hugh O'Brien medallion that will go in front of the old Journal-Press building across the street from Bat Masterson's."

Ten or more medallions will be installed during the coming year, the Johnsons said. Companies and individuals sponsor the medallions, which help to pay for the erection of the large statues.

"The next dedication of a medallion probably will be in May, and we are hoping to have the actor Dennis Hopper here for the dedication," Johnson said. "He is a Dodge City native who has made the town famous."

Other medallions will be dedicated to actor Val Kilmer, who played the role of Doc Holliday in the movie "Tombstone," and to actors Kevin Costner and Burt Reynolds, who also have appeared in films about the Dodge City area.

"We have talked about having Bat Masterson as our next large statue," Carolyn said. "But the first order of business is to get the Wyatt Earp statue paid for. We have collected one-third the cost of the statue, but we need another \$60,000 to finish paying for it."

The Trail of Fame is a non-profit entity that depends upon donations, as well as the sales of the medallions and smaller statues to support the project. The six-member board includes the Johnsons, Soni Hughes, Don Steele, Pat Hamit and Kent Stehlik. The Trail of Fame committee has 15 members, all

volunteers.

"All of this is being done by people who believe in Dodge City," Johnson said. "We don't have a building or a paid staff. We meet at the Santa Fe Depot or at the Carnegie Center for the Arts."

"People are walking the Trail of Fame," Carolyn said. "I saw one woman at the Big Nose Kate medallion, which shows Big Nose sitting with her legs crossed, and the woman looking at the medallion sat down to cross her legs in the same way. She and her friends thought that was funny.

"I was contacted by a Denver lady whose friends wanted to come to Dodge City," she added. "They met on the Internet in a chat room about Gunsmoke and are big fans of the TV show who know everything about every single episode.

"These ladies are from Pennsylvania, Colorado, Illinois, Texas and New Jersey and they want to walk the Trail of Fame. I wouldn't be surprised to see them at the unveiling on Friday. There's going to be a lot more of that; this is just the beginning."

Her husband agreed wholeheartedly.

"We are luring them into Dodge City, and they are spending the night here," he said. "I've had a number of people who live here come up and ask, 'How can I get involved?'

"Everybody in Dodge City owns a part of the Trail of Fame and has a stake in it," he declared. "It is an on-going project that still will be going a long time after we are gone."

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