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Kiwanis stress American Indian theme at 'Medicine Wheel'

By: Bob Zientara

Canada geese and great blue herons flew over windswept Ada Hayden Heritage Park Saturday morning as three Ames-area Kiwanis clubs dedicated the park's newest feature: a "Medicine Wheel."

The 40-foot circle, located just off Grant Avenue on the western edge of the park, was designed and built in honor of the First Nation People of the Great Plains. It is covered with interlocking pavers, flanked by boulders and native prairie plantings and sheltered by a newly planted grove of quaking aspen trees.

Hundreds of hours of volunteer time went into its construction, along with some \$30,000 raised by the Kiwanis clubs.

"I watched as people well into their 60s worked very hard on this site; they swarmed over it like ants," said Kiwanian Bill Boon, who served as master of ceremonies.

At the invitation of the Ames Noon, Golden K and Town and Country Kiwanis clubs, native people representing the Lakota Tribe and other nations brought drums, a flute, dancers and a spiritual adviser and healer to dedicate the site.

Boon explained the theme and significance of the memorial, which he helped to design.

"I taught about native plants at Iowa State University for 25 years," said Boon.

"This park was put here to bring back what Iowa looked like before the first settlers came," he added.

"I thought about how the prairie helped to form the rich soil of this state, and felt that it would have been a mistake not to have a tribute to American Indians and what they did to preserve this environment."

Kiwanian Barb Gurganus, who helped organize the dedication along with Boon; Gene Pollmann; and Jack Winkler said design assistance came from Carl Anderson, Dennis Jones and Tom Greiner.

"Barb was a president of one of the clubs when this project started, and she was a great motivator," said Boon. "She couldn't have been more effective if she'd had a cattle prod in each hand."

The presence of native people at the ceremony was partly the result of relationships established by Boon's daughter, Kelly, who works for Partners Unlimited, a nonprofit Des Moines group that offers art as a means of expression and self-esteem for youth at risk and prison inmates.

"She went to the sweat lodges and other events, and moved up through the various stages of acceptance (within the tribes or families)," said Boon.

While members of the Meskwaki Tribe declined to participate, organizers were able to persuade Lester Obago, a spiritual adviser and healer from the Lakota in South Dakota, to bless the site.

Other performers: flute player Richard Reckseen, dancers Julia Buman, Lucy Ganem and Kevin Wilde, and drummers Joe Redbear and Ryan Buman.

Obago's address stressed the persecution suffered by native people in the past and ended with a plea for greater respect and understanding among cultures.



Participants join hands as they take part in a traditional American Indian friendship dance Saturday at the Medicine Wheel overlook at Ada Hayden Heritage Park. The site was created by The Kiwanis Club of Ames, Town and Country Kiwanis Club and Golden K Kiwanis Club to commemorate the American Indians who first occupied the plains. Photo by Andrew Rullestad

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Inscription on boulder at Ames Kiwanis Medicine Wheel memorial

The Medicine Wheel is sacred.

The Great Spirit caused everything to be round: Sun, Sky, Moon, Earth

It is the Circle of Life

Inside the circle are:

The four directions

The four winds

The four seasons

This Medicine Wheel is in honor of the First Nation People of the Great Plains