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Madison's Statue of Liberty replicas need some TLC

Two ladies

by David Medaris

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In February, vandals damaged the Lake Mendota statue.

Efforts are under way to restore both of Madison's liberties: the distressed Statue of Liberty replica that has stood for 40 years in Warner Park, and the more fanciful Statue of Liberty that has appeared on Lake Mendota's ice off the Memorial Union Terrace at irregular intervals since 1979.

Sculptor Chris Murphy reports he is talking with UW Hoofers about another restoration of the Mendota sculpture, which originated as a UW student stunt that made the Statue of Liberty look like it was submerged but for its torch and the top of its head. Torched, rebuilt from scratch, left to languish in storage but in recent years revived, it is "one of the great college pranks," says Murphy, a licensed master electrician who builds control systems for microbreweries.

His proposed restoration would address extensive damage done to the work by vandals in February, as well as general deterioration over time. Project costs are estimated at almost \$20,000, with \$4,000 raised to date from Hoofers and the Wisconsin Union Directorate. Hoofers hopes to raise the balance from a mix of foundations, grants, individual donors and the university community.

The statue's most recent iteration was molded out of polystyrene, says Murphy. Even mounted on a plywood frame, it is vulnerable to damage. His proposed restoration would use more durable orthopedic casting tape. "Once it's painted or sealed, it'll last for a long time."

Murphy marvels at how the faux Liberty continues to inspire reverence among people who come to view it. "I want to do this right," he says, and help "keep Madison weird."

Meanwhile, at Pechmann Memorials on the north side, restoration has begun on Warner Park's Statue of Liberty replica. Sue Peck, treasurer and co-chair of the Statue of Liberty Restoration Committee, says the campaign gained momentum in recent years when the Madison Arts Commission identified the replica as the most distressed work in its public-art collection.

One of about 200 stamped-copper Liberty replicas distributed across the U.S. by Boy Scouts circa 1950, it first stood in Giddings Park and was moved to Warner Park in 1971.

Over the decades, many of these replicas have been lost. Madison's endures, but "has so many dents in it," says Peck, explaining that art conservator Tony Rajer will remove those dents, seal cracks, improve the replica's internal core, repair an arm and address other issues.

Peck says private and public contributions have brought the campaign within \$1,000 of its \$21,000 restoration target. Once that target is reached, supporters hope to raise an additional \$15,000 to establish an endowment fund for the statue's care and maintenance.

Rededication is targeted for late October, 60 years after the statue's installment at Giddings Park. "We'd like to bring attention to the statue," says Peck. "Many people don't know about it."