

YOU ARE HERE ♦ David Medaris

# Casting in effigy

## Neighbors push bronze Whitehorse sculpture

**T**hings fall apart, yet it is human nature to leave evidence of ourselves. The story of the Effigy Tree at Hudson Park involves the dramatic tension between human nature and the nature of things.

The story begins about A.D. 700-1200, when ancestors of the Ho Chunk nation shaped the landscape into enormous representations of birds, wolves, bears and other species as evidence of their respect for nature's sacred attributes. More than 1,000 effigy mounds were built in what would become Dane County. Fewer than one-fourth survived.

The story resumes in 1991, when lightning shattered a hackberry tree near three surviving mounds along Lake Monona's north shore. Neighborhood residents commissioned Ho Chunk artist Harry Whitehorse to sculpt the tree's trunk in commemoration of the larger mound cluster that once extended along the shoreline from Olbrich Park to the Yahara River.

Bearing representations of a wolf, bear, cub, lynx, thunderbird, eagle and the visage of a Ho Chunk warrior, the Whitehorse masterwork became a neighborhood centerpiece that drew the attention of passersby along Lakeland Avenue.

"It's amazing to see people drive by, stop, back up, park, and see families get out and to see little kids react to it," says Sharon Brady, who lives across from the site.

But like the original hackberry tree, Whitehorse's sculpture was subject to the nature of things. It took a beating from the elements. Various critters burrowed into its crevices to nest. Restoration some years ago slowed but did not stop the deterioration.

Karin Wolf, administrator for Madison's arts program, convened a neighborhood meeting last September to gauge interest in saving the sculpture.

**Wolf had already consulted with Whitehorse**, who proposed restoring the tree to a state from which it might be cast in bronze — an expensive proposition, but one that captured the imagination of Brady and a handful of neighborhood residents.

From that first meeting sprang a grass-

### Effigy Tree Project Community Potluck

5:30-8 pm Saturday, March 8, Goodman Atwood Community Center, 2425 Atwood Ave. Featuring artist Harry Whitehorse and former state archeologist Bob Birmingham. More info: 241-1224.

roots effort. "There's a core group of about six or eight of us," says Ann Brickson, who, with Edgewood College art history professor Melanie Herzog, has taken on the task of writing grant applications for the project.

A short time after the meeting, the Effigy Tree was removed from its site to Whitehorse's studio, so he could prepare it for casting.

Herzog estimates the total budget for the project at about \$55,000. Brady, principal of Brady Financial Services, has seeded the budget with a \$1,000 donation in hopes other neighborhood residents will contribute more. She describes the effort as a "collaboration to bring

back to life a piece of our neighborhood history that has been lost," and a possible model for other neighborhoods that hope to site or preserve a signature work of public art in their midst.

"On the simplest level," adds Brickson, "it's just an effort to restore the tree, cast it in bronze and return it to its original site. But beyond that, the sculpture is a metaphor for our obligation to be stewards of the effigy mounds."

Brickson hopes the sculpture will inspire deeper understanding of the mounds that have survived — and been lost — in Dane County. This ambition "may be beyond our scope," she acknowledges. Nevertheless, she adds, "We have an obligation to make sure we don't lose one more mound."

**Harry Whitehorse, meanwhile, has finished preparing the tree for casting.**

Herzog has seen the restoration and reports that "Harry has mended it. The details are all back. The texture is there. It'll be gorgeous when it's cast. It'll have all the detail it had when he first carved it in 1991." The target for installation is fall 2009. Setting that goal lends urgency to the project.

"The sculpture on its own isn't what this is about," says Herzog. The greater significance is "the sculpture's connection to this place, and the connection our neighborhood has to those mounds." ♦

DMEDARIS@ISTHMUS.COM



**Ice Brain Fitness Program:** Free talk, 3/10, Madison Senior Center. 266-6581.  
**Support Group:** 7 pm, 3/11, East Madison/Coalition of the Aging. 223-3100.

### LESBIAN

**Bears Group:** Social gatherings for men, Thursdays, Michelangelo's. 251-6429.  
**the Movies:** Meeting for dinner at 6 pm, Montmartre (please RSVP to men@tds.net), followed by a performance of "Pulp" at 8 pm. Tickets: 661-9696 ext. 3.  
**Dance:** Women Who Want to Dance event, 7-9:30 pm, 3/8, Club 5, plus salsa dances 6:30 pm. \$5. 770-7306.  
**Be With:** LGBT social group for those with mental disabilities & friends, 5-7 pm, 3/12, h-Gateway Mall. 255-8582.  
**Connection:** Social group for LGBTQ people & experienced mental health issues, 4 pm, Reach-Gateway Mall. 255-8582.  
**Sitting Referral Service:** Free assistanceGBT-friendly sitters: 255-8582.

### WORKS

events, see [www.TheDailyPage.com](http://www.TheDailyPage.com).  
**Ret:** With Golden Retriever Rescue of Wisconsin, 1 pm, 3/8, Bad Dog Frida. Free. 442-6868.  
**Community Energy Resource Fair:** Information who wish to lower their bills, set up payments or apply for energy assistance with Gas & Electric: 1:30-4:30 pm, 3/8, Mt Community Learning Center. 252-4703.  
**Safe Schools Alliance for Safe Schools Youth School Applications** invited through 3/10 from high school seniors (regardless of sexual orientation or identity) who have demonstrated a commitment to promoting respect for all, with an emphasis on issues. Info/forms: [sfsafeschools.org](http://sfsafeschools.org) or 661-4141.  
**Trust for Historic Preservation Seeks Volunteers** to lead historic walking tours in the downtown, May-September. No experience necessary. Training session 6:30-8:30 pm, 3/12, Century. Info: [www.madisontrust.org](http://www.madisontrust.org) or 441-8864.  
**Grant Applications:** Town of Madison & Metropolitan Planning Council invite applications for their grant program: "Hands Across South" for community-based programs benefiting south side residents. Deadline: 4:30 pm, 3/14. [cvc@terracom.net](mailto:cvc@terracom.net) or 260-8098.  
**Cancer Society Youth Scholarships:** Students invited through 3/15 from Wisconsin diagnosed with cancer before age 21 (and under age 25) who are enrolled for post-secondary education for 2008 fall semester. Info: [cancer.org](http://cancer.org) or 800-227-2345.

### ENVIRONMENT

**Work at the Arboretum:** Annual free information, 1-4:30 pm, 3/7, Visitor Center. 263-7344.  
**Work Day:** Clearing invasives & burning brush, 3/8, Prairie Moraine County Park. Meet at B parking lot. 845-6437.  
**Restoration Work Party:** 9 am-noon, 3/8, Visitor Center. 265-5214.  
**Work Day:** Prairie restoration, 9 am, 3/9, h State Wildlife Area. Directions: 441-9827.  
**Spring Forward Walk:** 1 pm, 3/9, Center. 263-7888.  
**Family Walk:** "Mud," 1:30-2:30 pm, Visitor Center. 263-7888.  
**Open:** Free hands-on seed starting/propagation instruction by Sun Prairie Community Garden Bailey & Schönheit Gardens' Heidi Kuhler, 3/11, Sun Prairie Library. 825-0702.  
**Groundwater:** Where it Comes From, 7:00-8:00 pm, Free talk by UW Extension's Kenneth M. Goetz, 3/12, Lakeview Library. 242-8525.