

[Home](#)[About](#)[Contributors](#)

## Homecoming Weekend



Before. Detail of Whitehorse sculpture, prior to removal.  
Photo: David Medaris, Isthmus Publishing.

High schools and colleges everywhere will hold homecoming celebrations this month and next, but the only one I plan to attend has nothing to do with football.

Next Saturday, September 26, neighbors in east Madison will gather to commemorate the return of a much-loved work of public art to a tiny lakeside park. "Let the Great Spirits Soar" is a Harry Whitehorse sculpture, commissioned in 1991 by the City of Madison Committee for the Arts, the Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission and the neighborhood. Here in the Elmside division where the sculpture is located, we know it as the Effigy Tree.

Having suffered significant damage from years of Wisconsin winters, the piece was twice removed from Madison's Hudson Park for repair by Ho-Chunk artist Whitehorse. Last year, neighbors worked with Whitehorse to propose and finance a more permanent solution. They raised the money to transfer the piece to a Milwaukee foundry, where it was cast in bronze. Now the sculpture, originally carved from a lightning-damaged hackberry tree, has come home.

The Ho-Chunk Nation has generously offered to sponsor Saturday's event, Elder Gordon Thunder will emcee, and the Thundercloud Singers will perform. But as much as neighbors love the sculpture, it's more than art we'll be celebrating. Like the Effigy Tree itself, the festivities honor the ancestral Indian mounds that tie the Ho-Chunk Nation to this land. The sculpture marks the location of three mounds: bear, lynx and panther effigies.

Last year, I wrote a Portal Wisconsin [article](#) on Wisconsin's Indian mounds, in which I referred to the Effigy Tree conservation effort. In the course of my research for that piece, I discovered a map of mounds that had been lost to urban development. It indicated that my neighborhood in Madison's Elmside addition is the original site of a cluster of linear and conical effigy mounds. In fact, I believe my own house might sit atop what was once a large bird effigy.

Though I haven't been able to relocate that map, I do own a

### categories

- o [architecture](#)
- o [culture](#)
- o [environment](#)
- o [film and video](#)
- o [history](#)
- o [humanities](#)
- o [literature](#)
- o [media](#)
- o [performing arts](#)
- o [uncategorized](#)
- o [visual arts](#)

### archives

- o [September 2009](#)
- o [August 2009](#)
- o [July 2009](#)
- o [June 2009](#)
- o [May 2009](#)
- o [April 2009](#)
- o [March 2009](#)
- o [February 2009](#)

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### meta

- o [Log in](#)

[reproduction](#) of a real estate poster distributed in the late 1800s proclaiming the Elmside addition to Madison “the Saratoga of the West.” Lots in this “Garden of Eden” could be had for as little as \$200, or nearly \$5000 today (as calculated by the Web site [measuringworth.com](#)). That’s quite a deal by 21st century standards, especially given that my random search of land values (without improvements) in the neighborhood revealed prices around 20% more than that.

However, I think it’s wise to recognize the hidden costs. Thanks to investigative journalists like Barbara Ehrenreich and [Michael Pollan](#), I think a lot about the real costs of cheap labor, cheap food and cheap land, those hard-to-measure tolls that never appear on the price tag. And while there’s not much I can do to change the fact that a sacred site was lost to my current dwelling, I can participate in efforts to honor and preserve the three mounds that remain.

In making a case for recasting the sculpture in bronze, Effigy Tree Project spokesperson Ann Brickson has said, “Permanent materials remind us of our permanent obligation.” I interpret her comment as referring not only to the sculpture, but to the mounds. And on Saturday, I expect we’ll reaffirm that responsibility.



After. Detail of Whitehorse sculpture, repaired and cast in bronze. Photo: Tammy Kempfert.

Please join our homecoming celebration! The public is invited to the ceremony, beginning at 1:00 p.m., September 26, at the corner of Maple Street and Lakeland Avenue in Madison. A portion of Lakeland Avenue will be closed during the festivities.

Finally, if you would like to know more about the history of the Effigy Tree Project, David Medaris has chronicled the campaign in Isthmus Weekly, a Madison-based paper:

[The Harry Whitehorse ‘Effigy Tree’ is in peril](#)

[The Effigy Tree departs overlook above Lake Monona](#)

[The Effigy Tree returns to its home on Lake Monona](#)

–Tammy Kempfert

This entry was posted on Saturday, September 19th, 2009 at 9:58 pm and is filed under [culture](#), [history](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can [leave a response](#), or [trackback](#) from your own site.

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#### pages

- o [About](#)
- o [Contributors](#)

#### September 2009

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
		1	2	3	4	5 6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

[« Aug](#)

2 Responses to “Homecoming Weekend”

**Marie Sprinter Says:**

September 22, 2009 at 2:11 am | [Reply](#)



The Effigy Tree's homecoming means a lot to the people of the elmside division. It also means that eventhough time changes so many things, like the landscape of this neighborhood,we, also, will have a chance to someday go home—wherever that might be.

**Ed Linville Says:**

September 24, 2009 at 12:07 am | [Reply](#)



Beautifully written! All of us who contributed time and or money are appreciative of participating in this great beauty and respectfull of those who came before us who recognized the strength and beauty of this land.

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