

ISTHMUS | The Daily Page

Harry Whitehorse leads Effigy Tree homecoming (video)

by David Medaris

on Sunday 09/27/2009 8:00 am

A neighborhood, a city and a nation welcomed a tree home to Hudson Park on Lake Monona's north shore during formal rededication ceremonies Saturday afternoon for "Let the Great Spirits Soar," the extraordinary sculpture by Ho-Chunk artist Harry Whitehorse.

This is the third time the tree has been dedicated. The first was back in 1991, when a bolt of lightning struck a hackberry tree at the park and shattered all but its trunk. A handful of neighborhood residents commissioned Whitehorse to create a sculpture commemorating the park's sacred effigy mounds and the ancient culture that created them. After time, weather and nature gradually ravaged the resulting masterpiece, Whitehorse restored it some years later and it was rededicated. But if restoration could forestall the sculpture's deterioration, it could not stop it. More years passed. The tree's deterioration, while slowed, continued to eat away at the sculpture.

This time, yet another neighborhood group took it upon themselves to mount a campaign to save the tree. Working with Whitehorse, the Ho-Chunk Nation and some of the city's and county's most prominent arts and philanthropic entities, they raised funds to have the sculpture cast in bronze.

Reinstalled this summer, the sculpture was at last rededicated Saturday, in formal ceremonies that were as celebratory as they were rich in tradition. The Thundercloud Singers performed, and Ho-Chunk dancers enlisted onlookers in attendance to join in dancing around the drum circle. The artist himself was resplendent as he carried the Ho-Chunk flag to begin the rededication. Throughout the ceremonies, Ho-Chunk elder Gordon Thunder provided insights into the indigenous nation's history, language and sacred mound culture, explaining the significance of Ho-Chunk heritage and expressing hope that the next generation might help perpetuate it for generations to come.

Those involved in the fundraising campaign to preserve Whitehorse's wood sculpture in bronze also spoke during the rededication, celebrating what had been accomplished.

Watch a video clip of the "Grand Entry" for the rededication.



Indeed, a sense of accomplishment was palpable throughout the afternoon. In welcoming the Whitehorse masterpiece back to the neighborhood as a bronze monument, that sense was enjoyed by a neighborhood, city and Ho-Chunk nation that share in an achievement as joyous as it is lasting.