

A Visitor's Center in Prescott's Freedom Park



Twenty six years ago, 41 Americans were taken hostage in the United States Embassy in Teheran. Their prolonged captivity in Iran kept the country focused on the hostages and their ordeal for over a year. During those months of agonized waiting, an American Eagle was shot in the area of Guttenberg, Iowa. Arrangements were made to transfer the injured eagle to the University of Minnesota Raptor Center for rehabilitation. The Eagle, called "Freedom" by those who cared for her, was later flown to Washington, D.C. to take part in a ceremony honoring the Iranian hostages and other prisoners of war.

In January 1981, after 445 days in captivity, the hostages were set free. In recognition of that event, the now recovered Eagle who had symbolized the Americans held captive, was taken to a bluff overlooking the confluence of the Mississippi and St. Croix Rivers and released. The expansive wings lifted the Eagle from the bluff and carried her to freedom.

The site from which the eagle took flight, just outside of Prescott, Wisconsin, became known as Freedom Park. It was a milestone event for the City of Prescott. And those who participated in the ceremony a quarter of century ago, including one of the former hostages, gathered again to

celebrate the 25-year anniversary of the release on Labor Day 2006.

Yet another milestone was celebrated that day. The culmination of several years of work by the Prescott Foundation to establish a visitors center in Freedom Park and the renovation of the park itself. What had once been a neglected and underutilized site was transformed by the attractive visitors center, a new picnic shelter, three scenic overlooks, an amphitheater, and exhibits explaining the importance of the Mississippi River and its significance to the area.

In 2001, board members of the Prescott Foundation, along with city officials and other visionaries in the community, had proposed the idea of a visitors center to explain the rich cultural and historic heritage of that site. The initial organizers applied for and received three federal grants totaling one and a half million dollars to get the project started. Over the course of the next four years, another \$500,000 was raised from local businesses and individuals to complete the project.

In addition to fundraising, Foundation board members and others worked with local engineers to define and design the project. They also drew on the expertise of a nationally known designer of visitor centers and

national parks at the University of Wisconsin Steven Point to develop the exhibits. "Content is so important to the success of a project like this," said Grant Nelson, a board member of the Prescott Foundation. "Anybody can put up a building, but it's the content that's important." Display areas inside and out highlight the river and the historical significance of the area, including Native American heritage, fishing, logging, the button industry (which utilized clam shells from the river), the steam ships that traveled up and down the Mississippi River, and the Great River Road.

The Prescott Foundation also helped establish a 501 (c) (3) organization called The Friends of Freedom Park to help the city operate and fund the park on an ongoing basis. In addition, the park is staffed with volunteers and a paid director who provide year-round programming.

According to Nelson, Freedom Park was a defining project for the Prescott Foundation, which is less than 15 years old. In the past, the Foundation has supported other worthy causes, such as Carpenter Nature Center, the Destination Imagination program, school athletic facilities, local food shelves and a battered women's facility. But until now there hasn't been anything quite the magnitude of The Freedom Park project. "It has been very beneficial in that it has provided great visibility for the Foundation...and great credibility," says Nelson.

When asked, what the Foundation is planning next, he laughed and said, "Catching our breath, to be honest." "But," he continued, "after an undertaking such as this, anything seems possible."

The Prescott Foundation is one of seven community funds affiliated with the St. Croix Valley Community Foundation.



SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS

*Chuck Anderson Scholarship Fund**** was established April, 2006, to award a scholarship in honor of Coach Chuck Anderson to a Senior tennis player who participated on the SAHS Tennis Team.

Paul L. Anderson Scholarship Fund was established December, 2003 and awards two scholarships to graduates of Hudson High School entering post secondary education who have participated on the tennis team.

Anne Cernohous Borchardt Music Scholarship Fund was established June 2000 to provide scholarships for the study of voice and/or piano for students from the St. Croix River Valley or East Metro area of St. Paul.

"Coach" Wes Windmiller Memorial Scholarship Fund was established in April, 2004. The fund awards a scholarship to a senior boy basketball player who is a member of the Stillwater Area High School basketball team.

Doris Fuka Scholarship Fund was established July, 1999 to provide scholarships to River Falls High School graduates entering college who have excelled in speech activities.

Janet Hansen Scholarship Fund was established June, 2000 to provide college scholarships to River Falls High School graduates entering the field of elementary education.

Dr. Val Kremser Medical Scholarship Fund was established December, 1999 to provide a scholarship annually to an Amery High School graduate entering study in a medical field.

Karl D. Ludvigson Memorial Scholarship Fund was established December, 1999 to provide scholarships for students graduating from Osceola High School and attending post-secondary education programs.

James McLaughlin Scholarship Fund was established in December, 2002, to provide scholarships to students at Stillwater Area High School who have been selected by other students as Most Valuable Players in a sport.

Bradley W. Nordstrand Scholarship Fund was established June, 2001 to provide scholarships for graduating seniors who participated in the Phipps Center for the Arts Children's Theater Program.

*Ern Peaslee Memorial Scholarship Fund**** was established July, 2005, to award a scholarship to honor the memory of Ern Peaslee, to a senior boy track and field player who participated on the SAHS track and field team.

SCVCF Young Life/Realife Scholarship Fund is awarded to a Stillwater Area High School graduate attending post-secondary education who has participated in faith-based opportunities.

St. Croix Valley Harley Owner's Group Scholarship Fund was established December, 1999 to provide scholarships to high school graduates from Polk, St. Croix and Pierce counties in Wisconsin and Chisago and Washington counties in Minnesota for post secondary education.

***New funds established this fiscal year