



# Daily Times Herald

## CARROLL, IOWA

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## Great Places projects are moving at Coon Rapids

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Hybrid icons symbolizing Coon Rapids' history in hybrid seed corn were built in November as part of a streetscaping project. Landscaping and plantings will complete Phase 1 this spring, while the next phase is expected to be done in summer. (Photo by Butch Heman)

Wintertime doesn't mean nothing's happening at Coon Rapids.

A number of projects under the Great Places umbrella are moving forward, involving the City of Coon Rapids, Whiterock Conservancy, Coon Rapids Development and other community groups.

Efforts are underway to finish Phase 1 of the streetscaping project, according to CRDG president Doug Carpenter.

Phase 1 focused on Fifth Avenue from Highway 141 toward downtown. A sculpture of three large hybrid icons, which symbolize Coon Rapids' involvement in the history of hybrid seed, was erected in November, and a large "Coon Rapids" sign and wall were built. The project also involved moving the city's landmark rotating ear of corn farther west along the highway.

The city and sculptor David Dahlquist aren't happy with the hybrid icons, however.

"We don't like the lighting. The lights are too bright and too intrusive," said Carpenter.

The Streetscape Committee also feels the center icon should be more dominant.



The committee is talking with Dahlquist about possible remedies, which will probably involve adding panels to the sculpture to reduce light intensity, and it's working to get larger letters for the city sign.

TK Concrete of Pella, which landed the \$364,000 contract for building the icons, was delayed in its work last year, which meant much of the Phase 1 landscaping had to be postponed. Some shrubs were planted, but most of the plantings will be done this spring, including trees along a wall that runs from behind the icons to a curve on the Town Loop Trail, trees between the trail and road, and tall grass to symbolize Coon Rapids' location on the prairie.

Phase 2 of the streetscape will be put out for bidding this spring. That work area runs from the end of Phase 1 to the railroad tracks. Curb and gutter and storm sewers will be installed, and the town trail will be extended to the

railroad tracks.

The Phase 2 area will be highlighted by 8-foot-tall markers with terra cotta tiles depicting Coon Rapids' history, such as Garst & Thomas Seed Corn Co. and the railroad.

"That's part of drawing people up Fifth Avenue to Main Street," said Carpenter.

Long-range plans include replacement of streetlights on Fifth Avenue.

"We're really limited by the money we have," said Carpenter, noting that the project has secured \$500,000, including a \$300,000 grant from the Iowa Department of Transportation.

Since federal funding is involved, the contract must be awarded through a federal bid process. Carpenter said the project should be let in May, and work will have to be completed in August.

Work on the second phase of the Town Loop Trail has been going on since December. Three bridges have been built - one over the Middle Raccoon River south of the Highway 141 bridge and two over a creek that parallels the highway.

"These bridges are arched and aesthetically pleasing," said Carpenter. "They're on what we call the cutoff loop for the trail, for people who don't want to walk all four miles down to Whiterock Conservancy."

The first extension of the trail, from town to the Highway 141 bridge, was finished in December. The trail is surfaced with an experimental compacted aggregate and should require much less maintenance than even an asphalt surface, carpenter said.

A fishing pier with handicapped accessibility was built on one of the Garst family fishing ponds.

A contract for construction of a Whiterock visitors center, which will be located along the Highway 141 curve east of Coon Rapids, should be awarded in April.

Folks at Coon Rapids are also beginning to make plans for celebrating the 50th anniversary of Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev's visit in September 1959. Khrushchev fulfilled a promise he'd made to Elizabeth Garst, wife of hybrid corn promoter and entrepreneur Roswell "Bob" Garst of Coon Rapids. The visit is viewed as one of the first steps toward peace between the superpowers.

Khrushchev's son, Sergei, and Garst's son, David, met again in March 1995 at Coon Rapids.

The anniversary will be observed with lectures, panels, tours and meals in the Des Moines area on Aug. 27 and 28. The following day there will be events at Coon Rapids.

Sergei Khrushchev, his biographer and U.S. and Russian dignitaries are expected to participate.

"The planning is just getting started," said Carpenter, noting that anniversary committees will be meeting next week. "We want to have an agricultural progress celebration in Coon Rapids to focus on the changes that have taken place in the last 50 years."

"It is an exciting time down here," Carpenter concluded. "It shows that a small town can reinvent itself. Whether we ultimately achieve our goals as a tourist destination for the region remains to be seen. But it's marvelous what we've done already."

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