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Spirit Bridge

It took volunteers hundreds of hard-worked hours over the past three years, but the Spirit Memorial Park finally nears completion.

The park, which is situated on land that was donated to the town, features the restored Spirit double arch stone bridge. The bridge has an extensive history of over 100 years, having been built by Tomahawk's earliest residing masons. However in 2004, the Department of Transportation condemned the bridge on the river due to weight limits.

The "Friends of the Spirit Arch Bridge" group was then founded to prevent the destroying of the bridge in 2006. The core group of volunteers alternately consisted of 12-24 people. Their first step towards a new bridge involved painting and numbering each original rock for easier assembly at the new location. Cement contractors installed rails, and a stairway to the top of the bridge was created.

Extensive fundraising was needed to accomplish such a project, including a log cutting bee, syrup raffle, and a 10-day rummage sale. The most successful event was a pie social over Labor Day in 2006, which totaled fundraising efforts to over \$20,000.

LaVonne Meier, one of the initiators of the project, stressed the important contributions from our community. "All of this was done through volunteered time and machinery," she said. "It's been an accomplishment for sure. My husband's grandfather was a mason who worked on the original bridge, and we felt very strongly about saving it from being destroyed."

The park also features a wildflower prairie garden and two picnic shelters, with hiking trails and toilet installation are in progress. One of the picnic shelters is dedicated to the memory of the Meiers' daughter, who passed away 15 years ago from cancer.

"We're lucky enough to have been provided grant money," Meier continued. "There is a 50/50 land grant with the DNR, and we received \$2000 from the DOT. Also, a grant from Plum Creek enables us to hopefully have playground equipment by next spring."

Because the bridge was recommended for a national historic register, two graduate students worked over the winter to produce signs detailing the history of the bridge.

There will be an open house potluck lunch to celebrate the completion of the bridge September 6 at noon for all volunteers and fundraisers. The park is located on the corner of Hwy. 86 and River Road (just past the Lincoln County line).