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Freedom Park to honor African Americans closer to reality

By Martha Waggoner

RALEIGH (AP) - A gleaming abstract sculpture that's lit from within will be the centerpiece of a new park honoring the contributions of African Americans to North Carolina that's been in the planning stages for more than a decade.

The state Historical Commission approved the new design for Freedom Park on Oct. 30. The park will be located on a 1-acre (0.4-hectare) site between the state legislature and the Governor's Mansion in Raleigh.

Inspirational quotes from African Americans from North Carolina will be engraved on walls along walkways that lead to the 48-foot (14.63-meter)-tall Beacon of Freedom sculpture.

"Our public art and our public spaces define who we are as a society, as a community," Freedom Park board member Reginald Hildebrand told the commission. "They proclaim what we believe, what we value and what we aspire to achieve. This will be especially true for Freedom Park."

Plans for the park began in 2002, and an architect was chosen in 2004. But the Great Recession dampened fundraising, and supporters learned that potential donors found the design's focus on slavery too depressing, board member Reginald Hodges said Oct. 30.

The park's board sought new proposals, focused on uplifting designs, in 2016, Hodges said. Phil Freelon of Durham, who designed the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, and his firm, Perkins and Will, were chosen to design the new Freedom Park.

Months before the NMAAHC opened, Freelon was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, a degenerative neurological disease that leads to total paralysis. Despite the illness, he accepted the Freedom Park project. He died in July at the age of 66.

"It was our great hope that Phil Freelon would be able to be present for the groundbreaking and dedication," Hildebrand said. "As you know, he passed recently at the height of his accomplishments with the Smithsonian museum and he could have done anything with the limited time he knew he had left. He chose to invest it in this project in North Carolina, his home."

Contributions followed Freelon's name and the new design. The proposed state budget includes \$1.5 million for the park, provided that's matched by \$1.7 million in private donations. Park board member Kel Landis said in a telephone interview that the donations exceed the \$1.7 million target.

The design includes no monuments; the walls carry no quotes from people outside North Carolina. The walls will be made of precast concrete and tinted to resemble the red clay of North Carolina, said architect Michael Stevenson of Perkins and Will.

One quote located in a prominent place comes from John H. Wheeler, president of Mechanics & Farmers Bank from 1952 to 1978 and a founder of the Durham Committee on Negro Affairs: "The battle for freedom begins every morning."

"We think that really sets the tone as you enter the park," Stevenson said.

Meanwhile, the beacon will be designed in a shiny metallic so that it's lit from both the inside and the outside, he said. As it reaches toward the sky, it will represent "a brighter future for everybody," he said.

A groundbreaking for the park is planned for December. Stevenson estimated that completing it will take about a year.



TI'EJA WOODSON, MISS NCCU 2019-20 NCCU PHOTO BY VERNON SAMUEL

Eagle Cheerleader Crowned Miss NCCU

By Jailen Leach, NCCU Sports Information Intern

North Carolina Central University cheerleader Ti'Eja Woodson was crowned Miss NCCU for the 2019-20 school year during the Miss and Mister NCCU Coronation and Ball on Monday night.

Miss NCCU is a position within the Student Government Association (SGA), an organization that creates and hosts events and service projects. Woodson will be the third cheerleader and the fourth overall student-athlete to serve as Miss NCCU since 2008.

A senior business major from Richmond, Virginia, Woodson spoke about how her decision to pursue the Miss NCCU crown was spontaneous.

"I know a lot of girls come to school wishing to be the next Miss NCCU," Woodson said. "However, that was never an intention of mine. It just happened."

Woodson also mentions that some of her friends and teammates influenced her decision as well.

"Many of my friends said they could see me in the position," Woodson said. "I thought about it and decided to give it a try."

Head cheerleading coach LuAnn Edmonds-Harris gave high praise to the new Miss NCCU.

"She has many qualities that will help her be successful in her new role," Edmonds-Harris said. "She is organized, persistent, and very good at meeting and dialoguing with new people."

Woodson talked about her plans for her role.

"As Miss NCCU, I want to bring awareness to the campus of individuality and diversity," Woodson said.

Edmonds-Harris also spoke on some of the things that Woodson has done as an NCCU cheerleader that could benefit her.

"We prepare them for leadership starting their freshman year, providing them opportunities to serve the community," Edmonds-Harris said. "We do encourage our student-athletes to step outside of the box."

Woodson is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, and has done multiple community service projects with the organization.

Woodson mentioned how her new position will not change her mindset.

"I will continue to be myself, but I do know my position," Woodson said. "As well as knowing there is a time and place for everything."

Edmonds-Harris also spoke on what it means to have one of her student-athletes be in a position of office at the university.

"It makes a statement to the student population, faculty, staff and alumni, that our cheerleading program has high morals and ethical values," Edmonds-Harris said. "Cheer is such a small piece of the pie."

Kansas City voters to decide if King Boulevard will stay

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) - Kansas City, Missouri, voters will decide if a lengthy and historic street named in honor of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. should keep that name or revert to its old one.

Until January, the nearly 10-mile-long, street through the city's predominantly black east side was known as The Paseo. The City Council voted to rename it Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, but many in the community want the old name back. The Kansas City Star reports that a petition drive successfully put the issue on the Nov. 5 ballot.

A group called Save The Paseo says it wants to honor King, but that the street is the wrong choice because of its historic importance to the city. The Paseo derives its name from Paseo de la Reforma, a grand avenue that cuts across the heart of Mexico City. The street in Kansas City was completed in 1899 and is known for its ornate fountains, pergolas and broad green space. The north end is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Save The Paseo objects to what members see as "disenfranchisement" of neighborhoods along the street, including the council's decision to waive a community outreach requirement for changing a street name.

"We love Dr. Martin Luther King," group spokesman Kellie Jones said. "We want him to be honored, but with a great man, he deserves a great honor. That great honor should be something that's not pushed and rushed."

But ministers who pushed for naming the street in honor of King worry about the message that will be sent if his name is removed. They say the street's beauty and prominence make it an appropriate tribute to the civil rights leader, who was assassinated in 1968.

Vernon Howard, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Greater Kansas City and one of several black clergy urging the movement for a King street, said Kansas City was believed to be one of the nation's only major cities without one.

"So we're the last to do that, and now we'll be the first to strip that away if it were to occur," Howard said.

Opponents of the name change started collecting signatures for a citywide vote soon after the City Council's decision. Jones said Save The Paseo volunteers have been knocking on doors, handing out fliers, appearing at neighborhood meetings and making shirts.

Howard said his group is out in the community with yard signs and literature.

City leaders are largely staying in the background. Mayor Quinton Lucas championed the re-designation but hasn't been active in the campaign to maintain it.



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