

'Grow 66/125'

An Art Project With Ties To The Future And Our Past

BY BRENDA K. JOHNSON
P&D Correspondent

Few communities shared history in early South Dakota statehood except for communities of native American Indians. The new South Dakota citizens were over one-third immigrants from abroad. Other new citizens came from central states but lacked generations of cultural ties to this region's land, according to John Miller's A New South Dakota History. Limited education and lack of common history must have challenged early South Dakotans to view themselves as a cooperative state.

GROW BIG IDEAS

Soil and an oak tree is how Altman Studeny, a teacher and artist at Aurora Plains Academy in Plankinton thought to celebrate South Dakota's 125 years of statehood in common.

"I wanted an art project that could engage every county in the state the same way," Studeny said in a telephone interview, "and there's nothing as common as dirt. It's under everyone's feet."

He chose Bur oak trees as hardy throughout the state that would be around and change in the future. He created an art project that allowed all counties in the state to participate. He wanted a big idea. He called it "Grow: 66/125."

"There's power in rural places," he said. "I wanted a project to engage people in new ways." Having grown up in South Dakota, he pursued an MFA in Studio Art in Maine. Now back working in South Dakota, he wanted to visit many parts of the state as an adult that he had not seen before.

His project was funded in part by South Dakota Arts Council and was

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ALTMAN STUDENY

implemented this year. He wanted soil from all 66 counties for planting oak trees in five gallon buckets. He travelled to all the communities to collect the soil. He also enlisted the South Dakotan Department of Transportation to help take the growing tree growing in the common bucket of soil back to each county where it would be planted.

"I became aware of the differences in soil the day we dumped all the soil out in the school parking lot. The soil looked like a patchwork quilt. Every soil was different in color and texture. We mixed them together," he said.

"Communities are different; deep in the ground and deep into history," Studeny said. "Only when soils are mixed together, do we get a South Dakota culture."

Oak trees were planted in buckets of common soil. Trees acclimatized in a display on Capitol grounds in Pierre at a site called Governor's Grove. Then they were dispersed back to counties to be planted.

"Back at Plankinton," Studeny said, "I see that all that is necessary to do something big, is to do it. For me, this was a grand project. The

idea is a bit 'out there.' Maybe that's inspiring to another with a big idea."

Altman Studeny contacted Lisa Kortan in May. She is the Yankton Parks & Recreation tree arborist. He asked her about a Yankton County historical and social site for the Bur oak.

"I chose Riverside Park because of the Lewis & Clark Expedition along the river and it's a visible place for a lot of people to walk by," Kortan said. Later in the summer, she planted the tree just east of the Territorial Capitol replica along the riverbank.

Kortan read that Altman chose a Bur oak as the tree for all 66 counties because he was impressed by a 400-year-old Bur oak growing in Wessington Springs. These trees are considered hardy throughout the state.

"I like Bur oaks too," Kortan said. "Along the river there we don't have so many oaks, so the color will stand out. When the little sapling came here planted in soil in a bucket, it was hardly eight inches taller than the top of the bucket. We'll be able to watch it grow."

"This Bur oak will symbolize the 125th celebration for me to remember and watch it grow. It's a symbol of great value to our community," she said.

Bur oaks from "Grow: 66/125" project are also growing at 310 20th Ave. Tyndall, by the shores of Lake Platte at the Platte City Golf Course, in Parker City Park at Parker, at Prentiss Park in Vermillion, at Hutchinson County Courthouse in Olivet, at Union County Courthouse in Elk Point, in Winner City Park at Winner, and the other South Dakota counties.



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Yankton County's Bur Oak sapling is planted along the riverbank east of the Territorial Capitol replica in Riverside Park with a sign. "Grow: 66/125" is Altman Studeny's public engagement project. He encourages us to celebrate South Dakota's 125 years of statehood by watching the Bur oak tree grow in soil from all 66 counties for years to come. Bur oaks are also growing in common soil in other South Dakota counties.

Fancy Frights: Disney Mansion Goes Spooky In Halloween Decor



MINDY SCHAUER/ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER/MCT
A personified pumpkin is perched atop droopy foliage as part of the Halloween decorations for Disneyland's Haunted Mansion.

BY LISA LIDDANE
Orange County Register (MCT)

ORANGE COUNTY, Calif. — No one around here decorates a house for Halloween quite like the creative minds behind the Haunted Mansion Holiday at Disneyland. It has been 14 years since the seasonal "Nightmare Before Christmas"-themed overlay was launched at the classic Haunted Mansion, and the ghoulish meets quirky meets elegant design continues to evolve as the designers tweak or add new features for a three-month run.

Black wreaths and garlands festooned with custom black-and-white ribbon, flowers and skulls deck the antebellum estate, while vases filled with seemingly dead arrangements accent the wall enclosing the "property." Inside the mansion, there's a 7-foot-tall gingerbread house that features a zombie gingerbread man flanked by candy cane spikes that's new this year. These are just a handful of the decorating ideas that can be adapted for real homes.

Brian Sandahl, senior art director for Haunted Mansion Holiday, recently met with the Register at the New Orleans Square attraction to discuss decorating ideas inspired by the 1993 Tim Burton cult film. Here are excerpts from that conversation:

Q. What are the signature decorative elements outside the mansion?

A. Black garland. We didn't even see black Christmas garland when we started doing this attraction. So we bought black pine garland and heated it and twisted it and got it all weird. ... Now there's black garland everywhere _ the craft

stores have it. We'd like to think we started that trend. (Laughs). Because when two holidays collide, when we're Christmas and Halloween coming together, we don't have holly berry, we have pumpkin berry. The red is gone. Our skulls, our ornaments, anything creepy, we throw in there.

Q. What's the palette?

A. We are inspired by the film. The things in it _ the snake, the man-eating wreath _ are actually in the film, and we use them in a different approach here. The palette is Halloween _ black, orange, purple, green but vibrant, bright colors. The classic mansion is rather subdued, then we come in with Jack (Skellington) and our overlay and it is quite colorful. It's what Jack's idea of what Halloween and Christmas would be in Disneyland.



MINDY SCHAUER/ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER/MCT
A flower pot dons a bow and bright orange flowers punctuate its base as part of the Halloween decorations for Disneyland's Haunted Mansion.

Q. What are the aesthetic guidelines you use?

A. Asymmetricality is critical. Nothing is balanced. There are very few straight lines. Everything is crooked. For example, the striping on the ribbon is erratic _ it's jiggled-jaggled. It's hand-made-ish, because Jack supposedly made all this stuff. ... Main Street is normal, Haunted Mansion Holiday is abnormal.

Q. The flowers in the vases look dead, and it looks like you do a mix of faux and real arrangements outside. Why?

A. Everything has a dark, macabre twist to it. We're up for three months _ October, November and December, so we have to use a tremendous amount of artificial foliage.

But we buy stuff that looks dead already _ the black garland, twisted branches and spider webs. That orange stuff that hangs from the garlands, that's amaranthus. It has that drippy, ghoulish look to it.

Q. What can you tell us about that Christmas list inside the house?

A. It's taken right out of the film, but we've augmented it. There is a naughty and nice list in the attic. On the list is the production staff. Steven Davison is double naughty _ he's the creative director. I'm naughty. I'll tell you a secret. My parents, my dog, my neighbors, friends, family, co-workers are on the list. It's one of

the fun things we get to do as designers.

Q. What are your personal favorites among the decorations?

A. I come from theater. I've done a few productions of "Little Shop of Horrors," so what we call the snappy plants in the conservatory are kind of an homage to Audrey II, which is the big man-eating plant. But ours have different colors and they have poinsettia leaves coming from behind them so it's like Christmas Audrey II.

Q. Where is the hidden Mickey in the attraction?

A. There are several. One is in the ballroom. Jack's sleigh

has backed into the ballroom and there are ghostly gifts coming out of it. And there's snow. The snow forms a hidden Mickey. On the table, there are black plates with spider webs that I did in my garage with spray paint and correction pen. We make a Mickey with a plate and two dessert plates ... we like to pay homage to the classic show (of the attraction), as well.

Q. What's coming next year to the attraction?

A. We already know what's going to happen next year. I can't tell you. But we've been waiting for this to happen for several years.

Talking Trolls and Our State Legislature

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