

The Antonsen Memorial Park project:

A Progress report

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Decades ago when the British author D.H. Lawrence first arrived in the Southwest, he drank in the shimmering landscape, the ruby deserts, the bright morning shine on the high mesas. Then one morning he wrote in his diary, Something stood still in my soul and I started to attend.

Likewise, as time goes by, as Sedonans shake off the blahs and head into warm and hopefully wet spring days, more and more locals are beginning to attend, too. What they are attending to is the actuality that the Barbara Antonsen Memorial Park will become a reality; indeed, like shoots of Tulips and Daffodils signs are everywhere including a real brand new sign on the projects City-owned two-acre site up on Posse Grounds.

Designed by longtime Sedonan artist and public citizen, Rayna Griffin, and installed by her with husband John on February 21st, the sign was created and built by Bob and Donna Baier of the sign company of that name. Like other Sedonans, all are donating a sizeable portion of the cost, according to Antonsen Memorial Park President Madeleine O'Callaghan. This important list includes Robert Schmierer's Heretic Advertising, New Territory Arts and Pam Israelson's Good Eye Designs to name a few.

Then there's Saltwater Systems whose creative leader Suzan Drury has created a smashing website, [BarbarasPark.com](http://BarbarasPark.com)-- for well below her normal price. I can't wait for the Park to open, says Drury. I'll bring all the books I have been waiting to read, and find a shady tree.

If community is defined as a group of people having common interests, then the prospect of the park has already drawn people together; as every day passes more and more Sedonans have decided to identify with the cause of building the Antonsen Park- with donations of all kinds and amounts. It is like they know that its going to be their park.

Indeed, since early February when the project was jump-started by ILX Resorts Chairman Joe Martori's munificent \$50,000, nearly \$11,000 in fresh funds have flowed into the projects coffers. And more will come soon from Joey Bistro at Los Abridados when \$25 of the \$100 per person St. Joseph's Day Winemakers Dinner is donated. Our town needs this little park, exclaims the well-nigh legendary Sedona artist Joella Jean Mahoney who contributed a commission valued at \$4,700 in a silent auction at Los Abridados last month.

In future, contributions may also come from the Sedona Digital Storytelling Workshop that's offering a special three day workshop April 21-23, 2006 at the Sedona Charter School. Part of the proceeds, says SDSW founder Eduard Uzumekis, is dedicated to the construction of the Antonsen Park.

Since then, the projects fund-raising team, led by Catherine Moore, has fired off major grant proposals, including several to the Greater Sedona Community Foundation which graced the Friends with a grant last year. Given the rising costs of building materials due to Katrina and the WAR, Moore observes. The sooner we get started the better. We'll be sending out grant proposals for the foreseeable future. All the funds must be raised before construction can begin.

It is not too soon to think about the realities of constructing the new stage, the walkways, the walls and details such as who will be the liaison with the contractor. Quicker than a New Jersey minute, up stepped Kevin Dunlap, Sedona's first city manager-and now a builder-- who is in discussions with the Friends Board to work out a solid relationship to help The Friends through the maze of contracting & building process as an advisor.

I'm stoked about this project, he said recently. What a great way to honor Barbara and to transform the words in the Sedona Community Plan about Arts and Culture, into something real and alive. Also signing on is Brock Blevins of Blevins Construction who will grade and contour the site and donate a significant portion of that work in-kind.

Even though actual construction is many months away, small events are already being planned for the coming months. Two anonymous donors plan to pony up the funds to sponsor a concert series this summer using local and regional musicians. Dubbed the Red Dirt Concert Series, people will be asked to bring their own chairs, wear old tennis shoes they don't care getting red dirt on, and a picnic basket. This is the beginning of developing the park into a special place for the residents and guests of Sedona, said one of the donors.

Tortoises crawl about, Scott Momaday, the great Kiowa poet once wrote, on the red earth, going nowhere in plenty of time.

Not so the Barbara Antonsen Memorial Park — it is going somewhere fast.

By James Bishop Jr.