

Insider

For December 16, 2009

By Kim Burger

Lions and tigers and bears, oh my! Well, more like buffaloes and bobcats and snakes, oh dear! If you've been by the Industrial Park lately, you may noticed some new animals hanging out by the lake. Last fall we installed the first of what we hope to be many silhouettes of animals native to the area. We call them our prairie critters! The plan is to install them along the recreational trails in the Prairie Lakes area so trail users will "discover" them as they enjoy the trail.

Our first installation occurred late in the fall with a life-sized bison and calf, thanks to contributions from the Cedar Trails Partnership and Cedar Falls Tourism Bureau's Marketing Committee. The idea was suggested by Rosemary Beach, George Shimek and the guys at Custom Blacksmithing and Manufacturing fabricated the pair, and Kevin Cross and the guys with the Cedar Falls Parks Division installed them...twice!

Our first idea was to situate them in the prairie grasses between the trail and Hudson Road near the Visitor Center so folks traveling on either the street or the trail would find them, but it just didn't work well. They weren't as visible as we'd hoped and they didn't look right in the proximity of the Horse and Rider sculpture the Cedar Falls Public Art Committee graciously installed on the south side of the Visitor Center. The pair were then moved to the south shore of North Prairie Lake and it has proven to be a perfect location! They look awesome with the lake as their backdrop and, as the sun moves across the sky, they seem to change. On more than one occasion we've worried that the little calf had wandered off only to discover that the sun's reflection merely hid him from view! When the weather is nice we often see folks posing in front of them for pictures, so we're taking that as confirmation that people are enjoying them.

Mr. Shimek has provided us with price estimates for a number of other "critters" and we plan to collect donations throughout the winter months and install them next spring. Our list includes and elk, deer, deer fawn, fox, bobcat, and rattle snake. The cost to create and install them runs from \$400 to \$1,200 each. So far we've actually "sold" the bobcat and rattle snake as Christmas presents! What a clever idea! If you've got someone on your shopping list that would appreciate the gesture of installing a prairie critter in his or her name, contact us at the Visitor Center at 268-4266 and we'll discuss it further.

In the meantime, check out North Prairie Lake to see the pair we have up so far. And bring your fishing pole! The fishing is great! In fact, the DNR and Cedar Valley Walleye Club will be hosting another Family Fishing Day at the Lake on Saturday, January 16th, from 10am to 2pm, so mark your calendars now and come out and enjoy the park!