

HAWARDEN...HOW IT ALL BEGAN

THE HEART OF HAWARDEN

Chapter 34

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The Heart of Hawarden Project; what better name could be given to the biggest project seen in Hawarden in over a decade. A project that incorporated the entire town; north, south, east and west. A project made possible by a group of City officials and citizens that presented their vision with passion and enthusiasm to the Vision Iowa Board in Des Moines in July of 2004, and received a Community Attraction and Tourism (CAT) grant of \$300,000 to make the Heart of Hawarden a reality.

When word was received from Des Moines that the grant had been approved the Heart of Hawarden Project went into action. Many of the projects were already in the planning stages and were just waiting for the funding to become a reality. The projects that were started immediately were; new playground equipment for the city park, plans to move the McNally Town Hall to Calliope for a Veteran's Museum, addition of handicapped accessible restrooms at Calliope Village, and filling in and piping the remainder of the Dry Creek bed. There were also plans for developing an outdoor ice skating rink as well as a rollerblade hockey arena.

The spring of 2005 saw the removal of the Central Avenue Bridge and the construction of an Outdoor Pavilion in the Dry Creek area north and east of the new Community Center.

The newly renovated 1926 School on Central Avenue into the City Offices and Community Center along with the nearby City Park, Swimming Pool, Day Care Center and basketball courts made this area the foundation of the Heart of Hawarden Project. Landscaping, flower beds, benches, new lamp posts on the street and through the park, the walking path through the creek bed linking the two parks, and the extended walking path through the creek bed south of ninth street, extending to the dike east of Hawarden and continuing north east of Grace Hill Cemetery and returning west on 23rd Street to Calliope Village gives walkers and bikers over 3 miles of wide, smooth trails to enjoy and explore. Along these trails have been planted, trees native to this area. The final section of trails will be added in 2013.

New pink granite boulder entrance signs at all four entrances of town welcome visitors and residents. Using these boulders to designate Central Park, French Park and Veterans Memorial Park portray strong, sturdy and enduring symbols, just like the residents of Hawarden.

It was during this period of volunteerism, and progress that the American Legion formed a committee consisting of six men: Dallas Huebner, Roger Johnson, Jim Kinney, Armando Ortiz, Jim Skogman and Harlan Van Egdome, to spearhead an ambitious venture to build a permanent monument to honor all those soldiers that courageously sacrificed themselves to keep our freedoms alive. The land for the monument was provided by the City of Hawarden, and the park where the monument now stands has been appropriately named Veteran's Memorial Park. The Veteran's Memorial contains the names of over 1000 men and women who served their country from the Civil War to the present. Many of these names, now inscribed for all to honor, made the ultimate sacrifice, giving their life for their country. All the money needed to construct this memorial was donated and provided by citizens of the area and family members of soldiers whose names appear on one of the four polished black granite blocks. Much of the labor on the monument was also donated. The total cost to achieve this permanent, inspiring and emotional monument was said to be \$60,000. Another prominent piece of "The Heart of Hawarden", dedicated on August 31, 2003.

The Heart of Hawarden Project does not just describe its location. The money received from the Vision Iowa Project was just a catalyst for many projects. Volunteers were enlisted from groups and the community to install playground equipment, and fix up buildings. City Administrator Craig Coffey proposed volunteer dates at least once a month to help with projects. At a celebration dinner held shortly after receiving the grant, Mayor Porter announced that now CAT would stand for "Community Action Team". A pledge of community support to help make Hawarden's grant application a success.

The Boy Scouts and West Sioux Students stepped forward to help plant trees in the Tree arboretum, and money and displays and volunteer labor were pledged by the Big Sioux River Historical Society to restore the Ruth Suckow house. The Hawarden Area Partnership for Progress pledged money for advertising. In addition Sioux County pledged \$15,000 over three years and the County Board of Supervisors offered \$10,000 in kind services to help remove the Central Avenue Bridge.

The actual cost of the Heart of Hawarden project was estimated at 1.5 million and although the Vision Iowa Grant was substantial, much of the money came from right here in the community through volunteerism and donations.

Not everything that happened in the Heart of Hawarden program was planned in advance and some things were the result of tragedy and misfortune, such as the fire on February 6, 2003 which destroyed two businesses in the center of Main Street. The fire completely destroyed the La Tapatia Hispanic Grocery store and the Bonderson Auto Parts businesses. In May of 2003 Dave and Pauline Bonderson of Le Mars donated the damaged property to the City of Hawarden and the demolition of the necessary structures began. Time passed and the large hole in the heart of Main Street remained as a sad reminder of businesses that were no longer there. City manager Craig Coffey along with the Development Committee of the Hawarden Area Partnership for Progress quickly committed to the renovation of the Bonderson Building that was still standing, and plans were made to create the interior of the building into a new modern facility. Eventually the building was leased to Missy Eilts and Heather Schwiesow who opened up a unique specialty

shop, offering gifts and items of all descriptions. Missy Eilts remains in the building as sole owner of the Willow Tree home décor and gift shop. The building has also been given new windows to complete the restoration.

The empty hole took a little longer to fill. The HAPP Development Committee spent time deciding what would be the best fit for our town. Hawarden's previous Dental Office had closed due to retirement and relocation, so the quest began to find dental services for our community. In 2006, Family First Dental Association started construction on its new Dental Office occupying the space left by the two demolished victims of the fire. This beautiful new, modern Dental Office opened in February, 2007 and is a valuable partner in Hawarden's business and professional community.

These are only a few examples of the commitment and dedication of the leaders and residents of our community. At least three other downtown buildings have had new windows installed by the Development Committee of Happ and the Hawarden Chamber of Commerce in a continuing project to renew the face of Main Street and bring the buildings back to their former glory.



Yes, Hawarden does have a Heart! Not only in location, but in the minds of the former and present residents of Hawarden who continue to work to keep the community viable and energetic. Pride that comes from the Heart of the people who love this town and are determined to continue the spirit of our fore fathers.
