

New Arbor for Friendship Feast



Anyone who plans to attend the Friendship Feast hosted by Native American tribes during the Chief Joseph Days rodeo can look forward to the event taking place in much improved digs. That's because the CJD rodeo board decided it was time to upgrade the old arbor that sheltered the feast, which consisted of a tarp secured to a log frame.

The arbor is a sacred place used by tribes to celebrate their heritage by feasting, dancing and other ceremonial rites. Native Americans have shared these traditions with the public for nearly 30 years during the CJD Rodeo with a Friendship Feast and dancing on Saturday.

CJD board member John Hillock said the decision to replace the arbor was easy for the CJD committee in charge of the project. "We thought this was a sign of solidarity with the tribes and solidarity with the community — that we want to do good things in the community."

Local engineer Ralph Swinehart designed the new 76-by- 52 foot structure. Vertical steel beams connected by horizontal laminate beams and rafters form the frame of the structure. Swinehart said the CJD committee always wanted a covered arbor, but the previous structures weren't designed to take the stress.

Plans for the steel beams that support the structure include wrapping them with either logs or timbers to give them a more natural look. For the same reason, the structure also has a shake

roof rather than metal. Semi vertical logs fanned out over the west end will be covered with a tarp or canvas to resemble a half-tepee that the Native American drummers will sit under. Swinehart said he's pleased with the looks of the building as well as the progress toward its completion.

Hillock tried to minimize his part in the building's construction. "Wellens-Farwell is doing the construction," Hillock said. "They and Stangel Industries are working on the metal fabrication; Terry Jones is doing the excavating; Casper is doing the roof and Ralph (Swinehart) did the design - I've just been coordinating it." Even though the arbor is a project of the CJD board, they remain respectful of the structure's purpose and encourage input from Native American tribes, including the naming of the area as well as the structure. Members of the Nez Perce tribe and the CTU are planning a future christening event, Hillock said.

In addition to serving as an arbor for the Friendship Feast, Hillock also envisions the structure as a community gathering place for other occasions, especially picnics.

"We'll get some picnic benches and a barbecue in here so people can pull in here and have a picnic. It'll be like another city park, but it'll be owned by the rodeo committee."

The area also is a possible site for the farmers market, wedding banquets and could serve as a campsite for wildland firefighters during fire season.