

Mountain Royalty Comes to Senior



Ram Pride at Its Finest (from David Markward, Class of 1967's Facebook Home Page)

"Mountain Royalty" has arrived at Dubuque Senior High School! One of my older brothers, Randy Markward, and his wife, Marti, started the campaign just about 3 years ago to create and bring the bronze beauty to our alma mater. THE RAM arrived yesterday! Kudos to all involved, especially Linda Culbertson, the 'get it done' lady who contacted many of the alumni who collectively contributed \$75,000 to make "Mountain Royalty" a reality. Thanks to Linda also for providing the pictures (there's a bunch...make sure you look at all of them!) that, along with Randy's beautifully written piece, tell you all about this magnificent project.

How Mountain Royalty (by James Marco) came to Dubuque.

Mid-August 2014 found my wife Marti and I traveling from our home in St. George, UT to Great Basin National Park in eastern Nevada. After stopping for breakfast in Parowan, UT (pop. 2500), we had to drive through town to get back to the Interstate. As we passed the high school, we were astounded to see a large statue of a ram in front of the building. Marti suggested we stop and take some pictures, and in doing so the attention to detail and the tremendous quality of the work became apparent. This was no amateur effort. The piece was mounted beautifully within a circular seating area, and a brass plaque of dedication was affixed to the base. Finally, we continued on our journey and as we were leaving town, Marti uttered these words, "You need to have one of those at your school."

Upon returning home I called Parowan High School and talked to the administrative assistant, Maggie Topham. (Every principal worth his/her salt will tell you it's the administrative assistant or school secretary that runs the school.) She shared the story of their statue, "Ram Country" and gave me the contact information of the sculptor.

Jim Marsico, who performs his magic at the Mountain Valley Artistry studio (www.mountainvalleyartistry.com) in Cody, Wyoming, is one of the leading wildlife sculptors in the country. He is quiet, unassuming, and direct. He has works displayed in many parts of the nation, including the visitor center at Grand Tetons National Park. When I called him, he had just completed a ram for Marshfield High School in Massachusetts and explained that each work is unique, not a copy of a previous work. The piece itself would cost \$50,000 including shipping and installation, and another \$25,000 would be needed for the presentation area, lighting (wait until you see this beauty at night!) and security camera. We needed to send half of his fee before he would begin his work, which would take approximately six months.

I don't know why I have such affection for the school from which I graduated 52 years ago. Perhaps it's because many members of the Class of 1965 have stayed in contact all this time. The internet has certainly made communication easier and efficient. Starting with our 10th reunion, we have met every five years without fail. But the main reason for our cohesiveness is that we have one person who has steadfastly taken on the burden of organizing the event: Linda Culbertson. When Marti and I got back from our trip, Linda was the first classmate I contacted and told about the Ram. Linda said two things: "Let's get it done!" (I swear she must have that tattooed on her arm), and "Call Terry Mozena." When Linda tells me to do something, I do it. As it turns out, at that time Terry, local banker and entrepreneur, was organizing the DHS Alumni Association and had started publishing an Alumni Newsletter. He was very supportive of the idea. In addition, a major renovation of the school was about to commence. The timing was serendipitous to say the least.

Terry contacted Marty Johnson at Straka Johnson Architects, the firm who did the design work for the school renovation project. Marty created an artist's rendition of the new entrance featuring our ram statue right in front. Then Terry presented the idea to the School Board, which gave its approval.

We knew all the funding would have to come from private donations. Early on in the process we discussed if we should specifically recognize people who give larger amounts of money, as is often done in fund raising efforts. In the end we decided that if we were successful, we would simply present the statue as a gift to the school from all the alumni in recognition of the efforts made on our behalf by the faculty and staff, past, present and future. (The underlying reason we wanted to do this project is best summed up in a Peanuts cartoon. "I wonder what teachers make," says Peppermint Patty, to which Charlie Brown replies, "A difference, Peppermint Patty. They make a difference!") Couldn't have said it better myself.

As we spread the word mostly by email, (thank you, Al, for inventing the internet!), the response was more positive than I expected. Some people gave money immediately, others thought about it for a while and then gave. One of the keys to our success was people who weren't in a position to give money, but were none the less enthusiastic and passed the word on to others.

Not everybody was a supporter. I think the majority of people go to school, learn what's necessary, and move on to build a life. For others, the high school experience was tortuous, the thought of giving money to such an enterprise ludicrous. Others were open to giving money, but not to something as superfluous as a statue. One class officer told me that the job market wasn't good and many classmates were awash in student debt, so this person didn't know one member in their class who would be interested in contributing to this project. But another reunion chairperson, Christi Johnson (Class of), invited Linda and I to speak at their reunion dinner and hand out information at the registration table. My brother Dave contacted his 'Class of 67' mates. One of them, the late David Nelson, author, entertainer, physical therapist, and man of the world, sent this message: "OMG! That ram is incredible. If we pull this off, imagine what others will enjoy long after we are

dust." It was responses like those from Christi and David and many others that energized us and helped us move forward.

Which brings us to the whole point of the exercise. This statue will stand as a testament to the hard work and dedication of those who went before us, those with us today, and those who will come long after we are dust. Born in the fires of a foundry in Cody, WY, and shaped by the hands of a skilled artist, it will travel 1,500 miles and on Monday Sep. 25th be placed at the entrance of our school. No fragile work confined to the indoors, it is sturdy and touchable. When my brother Ed conducts a great piece of music, he knows that each audience participant will experience the work in a way unique to themselves. So too our Ram. It will be ever-changing, exposed to the gentle evening light of dusk or the harshness of an Iowa winter, the pounding rain of a thunderstorm, the fog creeping up from the river valley, against an azure blue autumn sky, and like life itself, an endless permutation limited only by the boundaries of human imagination. It is an image of an animal not of our Midwestern world, but it can open a panorama of other places to see and explore and in doing so open our minds and hearts. Art students will draw it. Photographers will record its image. Musicians will perform around its base. Math students will figure its volume and mass. Athletes will touch it for good luck. The debate team will discuss its pros and cons. It will become a place for tourists to visit.

It is our hope that a special relationship will develop between the three high schools where Jim Marsico has placed his glorious works. Having lived on the East Coast and Intermountain West as well as the Midwest, we have seen the uniqueness of each area, and believe that students from each of the schools can share valuable experiences.

To everyone who contributed, monetarily or with support and encouragement, we thank you with all our hearts. Mostly, we hope people will enjoy Mountain Royalty. We sure enjoyed helping bring it to you.