



PHOTO

The statue of Sarah Winnemucca stands outside the Capitol ju

CELEBRATING SARAH WINNEMUCCA

Statue honors Paiute woman who led fight for equal rights

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Dorothy Ely says she is afraid of the airplane ride to Washington, D.C., but still could not miss seeing the statue of her great-aunt, Sarah Winnemucca, placed in National Statuary Hall.

"I think it's great and I want to be there," said Ely, 69. "It's very moving."

She is not alone.

Many, including 26-year-old sculptor Benjamin Victor, are excited that the effort to make Winnemucca the second statue from Nevada to sit in the Capitol is almost accomplished.

Today, there will be a dedication of a statue depicting Sarah, the daughter of Chief Winnemucca, who fought for equal rights for her people.

"I can't wait," said Victor, of Aberdeen, S.D. "I've never even been to D.C. and to go for something like

HOW TO SEE THE STATUE

The statue of Sarah Winnemucca is set to be unveiled at 4 p.m. today in the U.S. Capitol's National Statuary Hall.

The statue will remain in the Capitol Rotunda for several months before being placed among other statues in the semi-circular, marble-columned hall.

Visitors can enter the Capitol with a guide by obtaining a free, timed entry pass at the kiosk in the southwest corner of the Capitol grounds at 1st and Independent Streets S.W., opposite the Botanical Garden.

The Capitol is open from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

SEE STATUE ON 4A

Statue/Project is sculptor's first commission

From 1A
this — I'm a bit starstruck."

A year out of college, Victor's first commission will be alongside works by the master sculptors he studied. He says he feels like the kid who dreams of meeting basketball great Michael Jordan and finally gets to look up at him in awe.

"It's your greatest feeling," he said. "The piece itself is more deserving than I am."

Carrie Townley Porter, who proposed the idea to the Nevada Women's History Project five years ago and was part of the selection committee, said Nevadans will be proud when they travel east and see Winnemucca.

"Putting Sarah back in Washington to be a light for Americans will be the greatest history accomplishment of my life," she said.

The endeavor, from drafting the bill and getting it passed by the state Legislature to raising the necessary funds, was not easy, she said.

"We worked hard to get the bill passed and we did," Porter said.

Former Assemblywoman Marcia de Braga sponsored the bill, which was signed by Gov. Kenny Guinn on May 29, 2001.

Initially, \$100,000 was attached to the bill to pay for the statue.

"However, that year there was a tight budget," de Braga said. "So I removed the money. I just wanted the bill regardless and hoped we could find a way to raise the money."

There were some who questioned why Winnemucca was chosen, instead of another political figure.

"It was hard to argue the fact that Sarah Winnemucca accomplished so much," de Braga said. "She was picked not as a Native American but because she was Nevada's first public woman."

Winnemucca lectured to whites at home and across the country seeking justice for the Paiute people. In 1880, she met with President Rutherford B. Hayes and other officials in Washington, D.C., about the poor conditions of her people.

"Sarah's weapon was her eloquent tongue," said Sally Zanjani in her biography "Sarah



PHOTO PROVIDED BY RYAN MCGINNNESS

Benjamin Victor, 26, of Aberdeen, S.D., sculpted the statue of Sarah Winnemucca that is being dedicated today in Washington, D.C.

Winnemucca."

With the bill passed, the next challenge was to raise money. There never should have been opposition to the statue but there was, De Braga said.

"There was some controversy among Native Americans," she said.

The book says some people did not like the fact that Winnemucca married white men and called her an "assimilationist."

"Some see her as a 'traitor' who sold out her people during the Bannock War and even cost Paiute lives," Zanjani said in her book.

However, Zanjani said that conclusion did not hold up.

And the controversy did not stop the Nevada Women's History Project from going around the state to raise money.

"We envisioned that this should be a citizens' project," Porter said. "We wanted people to have a sense of ownership in that statue that represents Nevada. That they helped put

that statue there."

One of the first donations came from an elementary school in Schurz, which Porter said held a read-a-thon and raised \$26.

The Sarah Winnemucca Elementary School in Reno collected \$700, Porter said.

"And we were told the smallest donation was one cent," she said.

Then Nevada first lady Dema Guinn, who was part of the selection committee, stepped in and helped raised money not only for the statue in Washington but enough to have a full-size statue in Carson City.

"I did go after some people that I encouraged to give some money," Guinn said. "This is such an important thing. This is about history. This is about what Nevada is all about."

Winnemucca is the fourth woman to be placed in the hall, which Guinn said makes this an extra-special honor for Nevada.

"We had strong women and she was one of them," Guinn



CARRIE PORTER: She proposed the idea for the statue five years ago.

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said. "Her drive and dedication to me, I just marvel at that."

She said she also marveled at Victor's ability to capture the essence of Winnemucca.

"I think people will walk in and their eye will go straight to Sarah," Guinn said.

Victor agrees.

The proclaimed perfectionist, who spent almost four months at a foundry in Colorado with his statue making sure every step of the process went flawlessly, proudly says Winnemucca will stand out from every other statue in the hall.

He was there bending the fringes on the bottom of her dress to look windswept. Even the warm-brown patina finish had to hit the light just so.

Victor, who will be the hall's youngest sculptor, says the other statues are static.

"Sarah is in motion. And that will set her apart from every sculpture in the hall," he said. "I think everyone when they see it is going to be surprised and happy with it."

The statue of Winnemucca had to be in motion to depict her life as an activist and the enthusiasm she had, Victor said.

The irony is that Winnemucca now will stand permanently where she begged for, but was denied, help for her Pyramid Lake tribe.

"She believed she was a failure when she died," Victor said. "She died believing she had failed in her causes. Here we are 100 years later realizing she is their equal."

Although it will be sad to say goodbye to the woman he has spent the past year with, Victor says he wouldn't want to keep her.

"She needs to be out there in D.C. where she always traveled," he said. "She was there in her lifetime trying to make a difference. And she will be making a difference forever in the Capitol. That's pretty cool."