



# the bronze buffalo trace

## A PROJECT OF THE OWENSBORO PUBLIC ART COMMISSION

The Owensboro Public Art Commission has initiated a community vision for a signature public art project having the potential to establish a dramatic and historical branding for Owensboro. *THE BRONZE BUFFALO TRACE* is a three to five year project designed to commemorate the buffalo trail which was the predecessor to present day Frederica Street.

### HISTORY OF THE TRACE

A trail through the Kentucky wilderness worn smooth and deep by 10,000 years of thundering bison hooves is the predecessor to Owensboro's main thoroughfare, Frederica Street, and also provides a significant link to the history of local commerce.

The trace originated as buffalo gathered at a salt lick located near the meeting of the north and south forks of Panther Creek as recorded on an 1806 map of this area in possession of The Kentucky Museum, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green. Taking a northerly direction from this juncture, the trace most likely followed paths along what are now Highways 231 and 431. These paths eventually converged near present day midtown Owensboro before continuing along one route northward and descending into a ravine in the Ohio River at the foot of Frederica Street.

The beginnings of Owensboro's commerce along the Ohio River occurred at the top of the ravine. In the late 1700's, the community's earliest known settler, William Smeathers, traveled the buffalo trail between Fort Hartford, Kentucky and the Ohio River until he reached this ravine. There he built a cabin/tavern which soon attracted keel boaters who would stop for food and whiskey, establishing the future City of Owensboro as an important site for commerce. This legend is recorded in Kentucky Historic Marker #1307 located at First and Frederica streets.

## THE PROJECT

The first phase of the plan will be implemented in the summer of 2008 in collaboration with the Owensboro Museum of Fine Art. Its Ryan Park development at 10th and Frederica streets will be the site for the first installation of a bronze buffalo.

A magnificent 12' bronze bull created by the accomplished Western artist, T. D. Kelsey, will be installed as the featured sculpture in this new community green space. This park is intended to serve as a prototype for *THE BRONZE BUFFALO TRACE* and create a catalyst for its development.

The visual impact of larger than life bronze buffalo grazing in high profile exposure in Frederica Street's Ryan Park is expected to inspire other community spirited citizens to support the Public Art Commission's vision. Discussions are in progress with prospective donors to complete this initial herd with the addition of a bronze buffalo cow and calf.

## THE VISION

The vision calls for the placement of bronze buffalo in myriad locations on Frederica Street between 10<sup>th</sup> and the Ohio River and eventually into the new riverfront development projected for completion in the next three to five years.

To extend this vision it is thought that the buffalo trace could be enhanced by the addition of sculpture depicting Cherokee and Shawnee hunters, commemorating the Native American peoples who hunted buffalo here until the early 1800's. It is ultimately envisioned that a bronze flat boat complete with a figure of Bill Smeathers, the community's earliest known settler, might also be an historical focal point for the new riverfront development project.

Community leaders and elected officials have enthusiastically endorsed this vision as a potential blockbuster project on several levels. It is seen as not only having aesthetic and historical importance, but a project of infinite merit for tourism, economic development and educational concerns.

## PURCHASE PROCESS

The sculptures will be privately owned by the purchasing entities unless the purchaser wishes to make a tax deductible contribution to a non-profit organization which would, in turn, own the work of art.

The Owensboro Public Art Commission proposes to assist investors in acquiring ownership of bronze buffalo through a review process to locate artists working in this genre; assistance with selection of artist and contract negotiations; advice and assistance with shipping and installation and sponsorship of a public ceremony announcing the acquisition.

Sculptures are expected to range in price from \$50,000 to \$150,000 depending upon the quality, type and size of sculpture. Payments are projected to be scheduled over a two to three year period.

Additional information on this project may be obtained from the following Owensboro Public Art Commission members:

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