

Kearney funds archway to lure tourists

KEARNEY (AP) - Millions of dollars from hotel taxes may help put up an archway across Interstate 80 and a nearby tourist park to commemorate the Great Platte River Road.

Former Gov. Frank Morrison, who thought up the project, said at a news conference Wednesday that the historic monument and park he envisioned could rival Mount Rushmore as a tourist attraction. The city council this week approved a five-year, 2 percent occupation tax on hotel and motel rooms to help finance the project. The levy is expected to raise some \$650,000 to cover initial costs of the wooden archway that would reach a height of 80 feet.

Proponents say total costs will reach \$35 to \$38 million with help from private investors. Organizers hope a site can be selected and ground broken for the monument within six months. The park is scheduled to open July 4, 1999.

Morrison said the archway would link structures on both sides of the highway and feature educational and historic exhibits on topics including pioneers, fur trappers and cross-state trails. He also said the monument would use a panoramic view of the Platte River.

Although details of the proposed Great Platte River Road archway and park will not be finished until a feasibility study is done, the following attractions are planned:

■ **Touch Nebraska:** A system using electronic kiosks that give tourists information and road maps at the touch of a few buttons. It will help them find points of interest across the state and help them contact hotels and motels in other areas.

■ **Computerized Register Cliff:** A display where visitors can record their name via computer, and for a fee, receive a print-out with their name superimposed over a close-up reproduction of the names carved into the stone at the original Register Cliff, where pioneers carved their names.

■ **Treasures of the West:** Historical items donated from museums, attractions and communities throughout the state, which will depict the opening of the American West and the Great Platte River Road.

■ **Westward Ho! Adventures:** A live-action video where visitors can be filmed, in western attire, superimposed over a western action scene where they'll appear to be riding on a stagecoach, riding for the Pony Express or heading up a wagon train.

■ **Trails West Surround Theater:** A 360-degree surround theater that will show films of American Indians hunting buffalo, fur trappers breaking the trail, covered wagons on the Oregon Trail and other historical subjects.

■ **Wildlife of the West Natural History Area:** Wildlife dioramas of the plains animals, such as buffalo, deer, elk and ante-

lope. There will be special exhibits and information on where the animals can be seen. Ron Tillery, president of the local Development Council, said he believed the archway could be on a par with other major national monuments and attract 3.9 million visitors annually.

"In this case we already have 12 million people driving by and we just need to get them to pull off," he said. The park could generate \$8.7 million a year in tourism spending, he said.

"It will make Kearney a tourism destination, rather than a spot people pass by at 75 mph," said Craig Link, director of sales and marketing at Ramada Inn and chairman of the Kearney Area Hospitality Group.

A June survey of 635 interstate travelers at rest areas near Kearney found that 85 percent said they would stop at the proposed monument.

Tillery said a feasibility study would be conducted by an Orlando, Fla., firm to determine exhibits, the archway's environmental impact, its design and funding options.

When the idea was first made public in March, supporters said the monument would include an archway across the interstate, supported by pavilions resembling frontier outposts. The goal would be to pique the interest of interstate travelers and get them to see Nebraska attractions.

UNO Chancellor calls for better college retention

OMAHA (AP) - The chancellor of the University of Nebraska at Omaha urged faculty members Wednesday to work to reduce the university's dropout rate and keep students at the school.

"Each college, each academic department and each individual must work to make a difference in the student's effort to succeed," Del Weber said in his welcome-back speech to about 200 faculty members. "The most important element in the retention process is the effort each and every one of us makes," he said.

Forty-five percent of UNO freshmen in the 1995-96 school year had not returned for the school year that started Monday, said Ernest Peck, a UNO vice chancellor who spoke after Weber.

Statistics presented to the NU Board of Regents this year indicated that only 7 percent of black students at UNO, 9 percent of Hispanics and 25 percent of whites graduate from UNO within six years.

Weber encouraged faculty members to bear down on the problem.

"This is not a new phenomenon, and I am afraid that all of us have accepted the

Please see UNO on 10

Correction

The URL for the Study WEB service profiled in Wednesday's Daily Nebraskan was incorrect. The site is at <<http://www.the-acr.com/studyweb/studyweb.htm>>.

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