

Nominees: John and Arvie Degenfelder
Organization: Ramona (CA) Trails Association (RTA)
Nominated by: Jane Alexander

Work of Art Captures Community's Spirit

When visitors to Ramona, California reach the outskirts of town, where Highland Valley Road meets Highway 67, the farmland gives way to commerce—at least for a couple of miles. In the past, they were welcomed by a weathered wooden cross, erected by the Spirit of Joy Church, that occupied the highly visible site. These days, they are greeted by a stunning new monument instead. The monument, a metal sculpture by local artist Leslie Souza, is mounted on a lighted, native stone foundation. It captures the essence of all that is Ramona in a single work of art: the sunshine reminiscent of scorching summer heat, the eagle soaring across the sky, the cloud-covered mountains and of course, the horse. And the monument owes its very existence to John and Arvie Degenfelder, two long-time Ramona Trails Association (RTA) members, whose selfless hard work transformed the monument from a dream into a reality.

As visitors and residents alike drive past, they see the striking end result, but what they don't see is the behind-the-scenes effort and the months of persistence and patience that John and Arvie invested in this project. To those that know them, their dedication to the monument's construction at a site just up from one of Ramona's most scenic trails, comes as no surprise. The Degenfelders have shown the same spirit of selfless dedication and commitment to preservation of trails and open spaces for all to enjoy,

This energetic, ageless husband and wife team, who have raised five children and countless Arabian horses together, have spearheaded several key trail projects in Ramona, including Holly Oaks, which has an arena, round pen and network of trails that the public can use free of charge. But the Degenfelders' influence goes far beyond the trails they've helped clear, establish and maintain over the years. They have helped define the community of Ramona as a haven for equestrians and outdoor enthusiasts, and preserve the rural, agricultural lifestyle that is often at odds with the cliché-riddled Southern California lifestyle

For John and Arvie, the monument is more than just a work of art. It is a symbol of the Ramona lifestyle and the values it encompasses, and they could think of no better place to build it than at the gateway to the town. Securing the land, commissioning the artwork; seeking charitable donations not only of money, but of supplies, equipment and labor; getting the necessary permits and paperwork have been daunting and, at times, thankless tasks, but the Degenfelders have never lost hope. The two of them sat through countless hours of administrative meetings, zoning hearings, and planning board sessions. They knocked on the doors of county and local officials and community businesses, seeking a go-

ahead for the project. When they finally secured a lease to the land, they helped organize raffles and auctions and made the rounds of civic group meetings and social activities with a scale model of the monument in tow, describing their vision and slowly, the fund raising balance rose.

After all the setbacks and frustrations John and Arvie encountered, the pieces had finally begun to fall into place. At a barbecue in the summer of 2007, John talked about the difficulties in securing water for the site, a battle he'd won just that morning. The day that ground-breaking took place, John and Arvie were both right there, shovels in hand.

Community response has been tremendous. Several civic groups have inquired about reprinting the monument as a logo and the Chamber of Commerce featured it on the cover of its Guide to Ramona. At this point, all that remains is landscaping, which is being provided by volunteer students from Montecito High School. Although some would be content to sit back and admire the fruits of their labors, it's back to work as usual for the Degenfelders, who continue fund raising efforts. With these two distinguished RTA members, the city of Ramona would not have the beautiful piece of artwork that seems destined to become Ramona's signature image.

Monument Facts

Location: Highland Valley Road and Highway 67, northwest corner

Artist: Leslie Souza

Construction Began: January 2007

Estimated Completion Date: Summer 2008

Height of Monument: 15 feet

Width of Monument: 22 feet

Weight of Monument: 1,200 pounds

Materials: Steel, powder coating, native stone, indigenous plants for landscaping, lighting for base.

Construction Costs: \$10,000 (approximate)

Milestones: Groundbreaking, actual construction of pedestal, placement of monument on pedestal, welcome lettering added to base, landscaping complete (not reached yet)

Memorable Moments: John's speech detailing progress at the August 1, 2007 general membership barbeque.

Significant Setbacks: At one point, there was a problem securing water for the property.



Silhouette of tabletop-size monument

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