

# Settlers' Park buildings designed with pioneers in mind

by Dean Lesar

Bill Snedic has spent many an hour in the last few years designing and building the various structures in the Willard Settlers' Park to honor the pioneers who first axed farms out of the locale's virgin forests. But his time has been nothing, he said, compared to the lifetimes those settlers spent to shape what is now the Willard countryside.

On four acres of land on the north edge of the small village of Willard along County Trunk G, Settlers' Park was built to honor the work and the spirit of the men and women who moved from Austria and Yugoslavia to settle the area that would later be named after the son of a railroad baron whose line had a depot there. Snedic's grandparents were among those settlers, and his father and mother were there for most of the community's first 100 years. In fact, Snedic's mother, Ann (nee Trunkel), who lives now at the Clark County Health Care Center, near Owen, was the first Slovenian child born at the Willard settlement, according to a historical account of Willard published by the Slovenska Druzba in 1982.

A carpenter by trade, Snedic was the right man at the right place at the right time in 2003 when work began in earnest on the Settlers' Park building. Although Snedic was not in on the original planning work, he attended a committee meeting as ideas were being set forth for the park's construction.

A draft map of the park's layout had already been drawn, and Snedic could see there were plans for structures. He thought the first time he saw that map that the structures could be made to give the park a flavor of Willard's past.

"I asked them what they were going to do for the main shelter," Snedic said. "They said they were going to put up some poles and put a metal roof over it. I said, 'We could probably be a little more creative than that.' Being that we're Slovenians, we like to use wood and make things."

That input began for Snedic a far larger project that he ever anticipated, one he estimates may have consumed as many as a thousand hours of his labor and the volunteer work of others who helped him make his wood visions become reality. At the finished park now stands the main shelter built as



Bill Snedic stands near the kozolec he designed and built with volunteer help for the Willard Settlers' Park. The structure was used by Slovenian farmers in the old country for drying hay.

a model of a kozolec (a Slovenian hay-drying barn), an outdoor grill shelter and a grape arbor. Other buildings (restroom, storage, well house) were built with wood and bricks taken from old buildings in the Willard area.

The kozolec is the showpiece of the park, a 16'x32' pine structure built as a sort of memorial to the farmers of old Slovenia, from where the Willard settlers left just after the 20th century began. In the old days, Snedic said, hay was loosely harvested and hung over poles on the sides of a kozolec, so the wind could drift through and dry the crop for storage. A Slovenian kozolec could have been so simple, a frame with drying poles, or it may have been more elaborate with areas for storage.

"You'll find different lengths, different widths. Some were just a fence," Snedic said.

Snedic first crafted a scale model for the committee working on the

park. After the idea was in place, he began lining up the material and Carol Vedra scheduled volunteers to come to Snedic's shop to start the work. The first part, Snedic said, involved shaving the corners of the main structure posts to give the building a more "artsy" flair.

Snedic directed the volunteers as they came to add their time and talents to the project.

"I gave 'em a chisel and showed 'em what we wanted to do," he said.

Snedic said he used a basket weave and chip carve design for the corners of the posts. They are not Slovenian designs, but something he saw when in New Mexico. As the kozolec project developed, he added other small design elements as they came to mind.

One element is placement of small wooden hearts as decorations.

"In the word 'Slovenian,' is the word 'love,' so we got some hearts up there," he said.

On the west end of the kozolec is a large wooden sunrise.

"I figured each day starts out with the sun, so I wanted to incorporate that as an extra piece of art. As you go along, you come up with ideas."

**"I felt honored that I could do it for them. It might have been a chore, but when you look back at what they went through, this is a piece of cake. You'd be whittling on a piece of wood, you'd be thinking about them."**  
-- Bill Snedic

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