

Freedom Rock to be dedicated Saturday in Epworth

BY SARA MILLHOUSE
sara.millhouse@weinet.com

This week, Ray "Bubba" Sorenson is "just rockin' it."

Actually, his musical choice is pretty mellow: his art is what "rocks." Monday morning, Sorenson is painting a large boulder to honor veterans in a heated tent outside the Epworth fire station and city hall.

He's working against a tight deadline: the boulder must be completed by its dedication, at 10 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 21.

Organizer Cindy McDermott has been fundraising for the project for more than a year, after seeing multiple Freedom Rocks in other counties and hoping that Dubuque County would participate. She connected with Josh Jasper of Resources Unite to kick-start

the Dubuque County Freedom Rock and said she has had widespread, positive participation.

Sorenson painted the first Freedom Rock near his hometown 17 years ago, and he repaints it annually as a donation to honor America's veterans. He said he was inspired by the movie "Saving Private Ryan," as well as the service of an uncle who was a U.S. Navy Seabee during the Vietnam War.

He has now painted rocks in about 40 of Iowa's 99 counties, and completing the tour is expected to take him several more years. Sorenson spends about a week painting each county Freedom Rock.

Sorenson studied art and design at Iowa State University and has a mural business when he's not painting for



Sara Millhouse • Staff Photo

Ray "Bubba" Sorenson is spending a week painting the Dubuque County Freedom Rock, as part of an effort to paint large boulders in honor of veterans in all of Iowa's 99 counties.

patrons. He uses silicate paint UV light as the years wear on, that will remain unaffected by and though the artwork may

be subject to some weather wear, it's expected to last 20-30 years, McDermott said.

Sorenson said that when he got the idea to paint Freedom Rocks across Iowa, he had three goals in mind: to thank veterans, to promote Iowa tourism and to feed his family. He has two children, ages 4 and 1.

He spent last week in Oskaloosa and will start painting Freedom Rocks again in April.

McDermott said that, with chilly forecasts, the dedication is scheduled to take place in the Epworth fire station. Attendees will be able to visit the Freedom Rock outside after the unveiling.

Both McDermott and Sorenson are close-kipped about the details of the painting. McDermott said that they're

incorporating several local veteran stories into the design, and these details will be a surprise at the dedication.

Sorenson did the rough design of the rock, with input from McDermott. When it came time to paint the boulder, the design became subject to the rough, three-dimensional surface of the rock.

He said that the project is fulfilling its tourism mission, bringing visitors who want to "see them all" and bikers who are "groupies" who re-visit the original Freedom Rock year after year.

Details on Freedom Rocks throughout the state can be found on his website, www.thefreedomrock.com. "This is just a puzzle piece to a 99-piece puzzle," Sorenson said.