

AIM aims to end Columbus Day clashes with aspen in Civic Center

Despite relatively calm Columbus Day ceremonies this year, memories linger of the bitter 1992 skirmish in Civic Center. The American Indian Movement ambushed Denver's Italian Community and its gala 500th anniversary parade.

Although AIM was credited with a victory, some wondered if the real winners were the Italians who gave up their traditional parade in order not to offend other parties. Italians, who came to Colorado as one of the poorest and hardest working of immigrant groups, once desperately needed recognition.

As Ada Mangini Joy told me years ago, "Papa and his friends figured that Christopher Columbus was one Italian whom Americans would not throw rocks at. They were overjoyed in 1907 when Colorado became the first state to make Columbus Day a legal holiday!"

Italians, who have long since worked their way into community wealth and respectability, conceded to a smaller group now struggling to bolster its image and fortunes. This year AIM is holding out the olive branch in the form of quaking aspen trees. The Denver-Boulder Chapter of AIM, Douglas Remington of the Southern Ute Reservation in southwestern Colorado, and



TOM
NOEL

Glenn Morris, who wears a pony tail and an Indian jacket, is a Shawnee Indian, a graduate of Harvard Law School, and a respected and popular member of the faculty at CU-Denver. Professor Morris

aims to educate not only students, but the community. His efforts are not on just on behalf of Native Americans, but indigenous peoples worldwide. For the past seven years, Morris has been a delegate to the United Nations Center for Human Rights in Geneva. His articles and lectures here and abroad address the problems of indigenous peoples from Hawaii

to Nicaragua, from Brazil to Africa. AIM co-director Glenn Morris, offered the trees to the city last week "in a spirit of reconciliation and community."

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AIM first wanted seven trees around Civic Center's heroic statue of a mounted warrior. That bronze brave on a granite pedestal has become a focal point for AIM political and social events and sacred ceremonies. Morris said it "represents a balance or even a counterpoint to the nearby statue of the cowboy."

Both "On the War Trail" and "Broncho Buster" are the works of a one-time Den-

verite, sculptor Alexander Phimister Proctor. Ironically, both statues stem from the 400th anniversary celebration of Columbus. In his autobiography, "Sculptor in Buckskin," Proctor explained: "Mayor Speer told me that he wanted me to do two statues to replace my 'Equestrian Indian' and 'Broncho Buster' that had once decorated Denver's Civic Center. They were the two statues I had done in plaster for the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, but over the years they had disintegrated. Losing no time, Speer called J. K. Mullen and Stephen Knight, two local mill owners. Mullen said that he would donate the cowboy and Knight agreed to donate the Indian."

Proctor finished "On The War Trail" in 1920, two years after the installation of "Broncho Buster." These two statues were the first pieces of what was to be a Civic Center sculpture garden. Civic Center, recently restored to its original glory with renovated landmarks and new flower beds, is a designated city historic district protected by the Denver Landmark Preservation Commission.

AIM's goals did not fit into the Civic Center master plan carefully worked out by the Denver Parks and Recreation Department and the Landmark Commission.

So Morris met with planner Paul Foster of Parks and Recreation and landscape architect Phil Flores, chairman of the Landmark Commission. AIM agreed that Civic Center must be kept a balanced, formal design, not a graveyard filled with randomly placed memorials.

After coming to appreciate the symmetrical grace of Civic Center, AIM decided to donate fourteen rather than seven aspen trees. In a careful compromise, AIM, the Parks Department and the Landmark Commission agreed to plant the aspen amid the existing evergreens.

"I also learned," Morris said with a smile, "that in architectural and planning circles, the aspen tree is viewed in a lowly light. It is short-lived, suckering, and lacks hardiness. That to us is a reminder of our responsibility to nurture, to maintain, and to reverse the aspen at death by using it in our ceremonies."

Asked about a plaque, Morris replied, "Our feeling is that the trees speak for themselves and do not need a marker. We come from an oral tradition. Now perhaps you can be part of that tradition and help pass on the story of the aspen trees."

Historian Tom Noel will be among many Colorado authors signing books at Colorado History Museum, 1300 Broadway, Saturday, Nov. 20, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

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