



### About this Project – Text Only Version

The Keeper of the Plains proudly stands at the confluence of the Big and Little Arkansas rivers with hands raised high. Since the sculpture's installation as part of the efforts to commemorate the Bicentennial, it has become a symbol for the City of Wichita and a tribute to the Native American tribes who continue to gather at this sacred heartland. The Keeper also serves as the focal point of an eight-year, \$20.6 million restoration and river beautification project completed in May 2007.

The 44-foot Cor-Ten steel Keeper of the Plains sculpture now stands elevated on a 35-foot rock promontory surrounded by four quadrants representing the elements of water, fire, air and earth. Pedestrians can directly access the area from two new, bow-and-arrow-inspired cable-stay bridges that span both the Little and Big Arkansas rivers. Fire drums located on boulders at the foot of the Keeper dramatically light the night. A mist rises up from a pause point that leads down to the water's edge. Plantings of sage, bottlebrush, medicinal herbs, prairie grasses, yuccas and cactus further create a sense of place and time.

On May 18, 1974 renowned Native American artist Blackbear Bosin donated the Keeper of the Plains statue to the citizens of Wichita. It was erected at the peninsula point of the two rivers and dedicated May 18, 1974. Senator Bob Dole was on hand for the dedication. The Keeper of the Plains was rededicated on May 18, 2007. The area is free and open to the public year-round.

## Discoveries Along the Way

This is one of the largest public art projects ever done by the City of Wichita. All elements in this project have meaning. Here are some things you may discover on your tour:

Before you enter the Keeper peninsula, you can see that the area is mapped out with 4 quadrants of the **Circle of Life and Sacred Hoop**: Earth, Air, Water Fire. Each area of the Plaza celebrates this – the Earth is the rock formations and plant material, the Air's movement is shown by a **mist of fog**, the **Ring of Fire** is displayed at night and the water feature cascades water from the Arkansas River.

On the Keeper peninsula, there are 4 cardinal directions of north, south, east and west that are marked with **5-foot circular flat monuments** in 4 different colors on the Keeper Plaza. There are 4 times of day and 4 seasons to visit this site, as each time and season will unveil something new.

The Keeper of the Plains new home rests pointing due east, as Blackbear Bosin had originally intended. He arms outstretched reaches to greet the rising sun every morning. The Keeper of the Plains now stands 35 feet higher than he once stood. Now, he proudly looks over the trees and can be seen from Kellogg (U.S. 54). For the Native American community, it was important that the Keeper be on land. So the idea to elevate him on a pedestal meant that his base was still connected to Mother Earth. The **base** that was developed resembles a chalk formation with a limestone ledge cap. These rocks look authentic because the façade of the rocks are actual rock casts taken from Castle Rock and Table Rock formations near Quinter, Kansas. And when you feel the rocks, you will know that they are solid. No hollow rocks here! Several of the rocks are also real – some of the large ones were brought in from all over Kansas.

The Plains Indians believed that the **Turtle** was Mother Earth and they were all floating on a primordial sea on the back of the turtle. Can you find the turtles are on site?

Look up – near the interpretive walls and find the **Stylized Prayer Poles** are an authentic replica of what the Plains Indians would have. Their existence was to follow the buffalo. Then, there were 60 million buffalo roaming the Earth. When they killed a buffalo, they used every part of it. They were not wasteful people. This Prayer Pole was cast from a real buffalo skull found on the banks of the Arkansas River that was estimated at being over 200 years old.

The sounds of Native American drumming, rattling and chants echo in a large flagstone plaza ringed by hand-chipped limestone walls and boulders. Along the massive **Interpretive Walls**, environmental graphics help tell the story of the nomadic Plains Indians: their lives, beliefs and practices.

Photographs laser-etched into granite personalize the exhibit with the noble images of the men and women who made history here. Metalwork and limestone sculptures crafted by Todd Whipple, Tom Schrauth and Chris Brunner showcase everything from workday tools and weapons to lodging and ornamentation. Eagles, bison, horses and turtles – all significant to the culture – figure prominently.

A map shows almost 30 tribes from the Dakotas down to Texas who were drawn to the rivers' confluence for powpows and trading: Apache, Kanza, Ponca, Omaha, Osage, Pawnee, Wichita and more.

After browsing the Keeper Plaza, there is still more to see. Go to the east bank, by crossing over the second pedestrian suspension bridge to discover a lovely area to reflect on the beauty of your surroundings. Here, you will be engulfed by the sweet smell of roses.

As you walk along the Arkansas River, on the east bank, you will see many "pause points" which are simply moments to stop and reflect on the lovely scenery and artwork near by. The artistic benches are perfect seats to take in the wildlife fishing in the river below.

The east bank meanders along the River, moving forward and back, just as the motion of the river itself.

Along the River, look down to see the lovely stencils that continue the theme along the river's edge.

Before you go too far, be sure to marvel at the engineering wonder of the manmade dam that is making for a great fishing spot for the Blue Herons and Egrets along the way. This dam was originally built in 1917 and is still functional today. It is all tied together and made with concrete supported by wood and cast iron piling. It was once smooth, and the current of the Arkansas River has carved paths along the dam.

Where the sidewalk splits, go up to be on top of the outfall structure. There, you can visit the troll! When the path splits, many with children will enjoy an adventure to see Wichita's troll. The troll was a unique addition to this project that added fun and discussion opportunities for children and their parents. Ask your child - have ever seen a troll before? They may be surprised to see one chained to the pipes below the grate of the outfall structure. Some legends believe that trolls come alive at night, turning to stone in the daytime. Is this true? Maybe your child will know.

Interestingly, this outfall structure and the Arkansas River dam itself dates back to 1917. It is believed that this structure had some purpose when the trains ran through that area. It may have been a place that coal was delivered to provide energy for the city at the power plant generator that now takes the form of the Westar Building just to the north of this location. Designers originally wanted to remove this structure from the site. But there were no plans of the facility to determine its use. And when it rains, water pours from the outfall as if it's coming from somewhere – but no one could determine where. And the interesting design, which can be seen just below the troll's feet, is also a question. Why is there a square tunnel and a round tunnel?

When it was discovered that the concrete walls surrounding the tunnels were several feet thick, it was decided to leave the outtake as is, just upgrade the property. The troll was the brainchild of artist designers Bart Ewonus and Chris Brunner. Constance Ernatt is the artist that actually designed and made the Troll. Their innovative thinking to turn a negative into a positive brings a new whimsical element to the project.

Come down along the river and continue traveling upstream to discover Veterans Park, a lovely memorial park for the fine people of Wichita that served in the major wars of our time. The tribute to the USS Wichita was added to this area by the River Corridor Project to tie in the park and the riverbank. The two are obvious partners, and even more so by this recent development.

The USS Wichita is Wichita's namesake ship from World War II. It was a heavy cruiser that served in both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Here, the artist did an interpretive limestone wall design of the photo featured on the plaque.

Continue down the River and you will find a beautiful overlook that is a wonderful gazing point in the city. Look far south and see the traffic of Kellogg (U.S. 54) whiz by. Look west, up the River and see Exploration Place, the Keeper of the Plains, and all the way to Old Historic Cowtown Museum.

Right behind this overlook, just south of Veterans Park is home to the pause point that is a unique interpretation of war. These stylized blocks of cut limestone are of three different types. The two are distinctly different on the ends. Then in the middle, they all blend together and a third type of limestone is used. As this work of art ages, the differences in the limestone will become more pronounced.

Continue on to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Bridge and you have seen all 12 acres and 400,000 square feet of this project. We hope you have enjoyed your tour and marveled at the wonderful improvements made to this lovely, natural Kansas riverbank.