

Pine Creek Grist Mill wins national award

Cynthia Beaudette
of the Muscatine Journal

MUSCATINE, Iowa — When the shafts and cranks at the 159-year-old Pine Creek Grist Mill began turning, grinding out pulverized grains and bright yellow meal, visitors' faces take on expressions of youthful amazement and nostalgic appreciation.

For the dedicated Friends of the Pine Creek Grist Mill, the joy this restored Muscatine County icon brings others may be a reward in itself.

But recognition and appreciation for their work has

gone far beyond Muscatine County.

The Friends of the Pine Creek Grist Mill, a non-profit organization, was awarded a 2007 President's Award from the National Association of State Park Directors in Williamsburg, Va., Sept. 6.

"We have received local and state awards before," said Tom Hanifan, president of



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

This is a closeup of the award presented at the the Grist Mill.



CYNTHIA BEAUDETTE/MUSCATINE JOURNAL

Tom Hanifan, President of the Friends of the Pine Creek Grist Mill, holds the President's Award he and his fellow volunteers were given by the National Association of State Park Directors. The Friends are shown here at the Friends' annual Heritage Day celebration at Wild Cat Den State Park in September. Pictured are, left to right, Friends, Scott Gibbs, Dave Metz, Department of Natural Resources chief of Iowa State Parks Kevin Szcodronski, and Friends Ken Hyman, Agnes Digney, Mitch White, Dale Awbrey and Bob DeLong.

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the Friends of the Pine Creek Grist Mill. "But this one is special because so few groups in the country receive the award."

A volunteer effort

Since organizing in 1996, volunteers have committed their skills and time to restoration, interpretation, putting on special events and fundraising for the ongoing project.

Hanifan said the Friends have devoted more than 30,000 hours volunteers have donated to bringing the Mill back to life.

"The passion in the group for what we do is rare," said Hanifan. "The variety of skills among our members is rare for a small group of volunteers."

Nods of encouragement

Charles Salkin, president of the National Association of State Park Directors, wrote to the Friends of the Pine Creek Grist Mill in August, congratulating them on the President's Award.

"This award is presented to the Friends for your extraordinary contribution at a state level to furthering the goal of a system of state parks," wrote Salkin.

The Association learned more about the Friends' efforts through Kevin Szcodronski, the chief of Iowa State Parks, who recommended that the Friends apply for the award.

The Friends responded to Szcodronski's suggestion by creating a 10-page report on their project.

Details

For information on the Pine Creek Grist Mill call 563-263-4818 or go to the Web site at www.pinecreekgrist-mill.org

Where to find it:

The Mill is located between Muscatine and Montpelier, Iowa on Iowa Highway 22 or, from U.S. Highway 61, follow the signs.

The report described the way the Mill's builder, Benjamin Nye, the first settler in Muscatine County, built the mill in 1848 and the mill's vital role in the county's 19th century economy.

Several years after building the mill, Nye died following a deadly battle with his estranged son-in-law, George McCoy.

Throughout ensuing years, the structure was owned by various people and remained in operation until the 1920s.

Waking a sleepy icon

In 1927, lack of business closed mill operations and the state of Iowa bought the structure as an addition to Wild Cat Den State Park. State officials had hoped to preserve and restore the landmark, but limited financial resources prevented any major work from taking place until the Friends of the Pine Creek Grist Mill dedicated themselves to saving the sleeping structure.

In 2002, the Mill, which is one of only two water-powered mills remaining in Iowa, began operating again.

The Mill's new life has been celebrated with a permanent schedule of guided tours for visi-

tors in warmer months, educational programs for area youth and the annual Heritage Day celebration in September.

Mill puts Muscatine on the map

On Oct. 7, the Friends gathered for a picnic at Wild Cat Den where Jim Ohl, Iowa Department of Natural Resources Park Ranger for Wild Cat Den State Park and the Fairport Recreation Area, read a certificate of appreciation from Iowa State Sen. Jim Hahn and his fellow Iowa legislators.

Wednesday, Ohl said awards and certificates of recognition can have a powerful impact on making the Mill a destination point for travelers.

"With them, (the Friends,) competing on a national level, it sheds more light on this project," Ohl said Wednesday. "A lot more people will want to find out more about Pine Creek Grist Mill and the Muscatine area. We're in contact with lot of different mills throughout the country and we have more machinery than most of them."

Hanifan said the Pine Creek Grist Mill will continue to be staffed for visitors from 12:30-4:30 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays, through the end of October, if the weather stays warm enough.

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