

Faculty and staff news from the campuses of Indiana University

Peace Garden on IU Kokomo campus honors, Pearl Harbor survivors, WWII heroes

By Nicole Roales, Published October 13, 2008

A semi-circle of bamboo poles outline the perimeter of a small garden in the northeastern corner of Darrough Chapel Park in Kokomo. In the center, 10 stone pillars representing virtues -- inscribed with words like perseverance, integrity and serenity -- surround a solar-powered fountain. On the east side of the garden hangs a bell converted from a 105-millimeter Howitzer shell and suspended by a rope in the Japanese gate.

Designed by Karla Stouse's IU Kokomo students, the Peace Garden honors the concept of peace and World War II heroes -- Pearl Harbor survivors, internment victims and the men of the 100th Infantry Battalion.

Following an Asian culture class taught in Hawaii, an idea forms for a memorial park, and in its finest concept, public art becomes a community engagement on many levels and a conversation about peace.

"Focusing on the project really had a positive and calming effect on all of us," Stouse said. "We were really focusing on the concept of peace, and it changed the way we negotiated and dealt with each other. A lot of people have done a lot for us, and this was just a chance to give back a little. The garden is not about war. It's about the people who sacrificed and gave up a lot so the rest of us could have a peaceful existence."

The Peace Garden was a partnership between IU Kokomo and the Kokomo Parks and Recreation Department. IU Kokomo students, faculty and staff designed and constructed different aspects of the garden, which was first conceived after Stouse, a senior lecturer in English, and students in her Asian culture class traveled to Hawaii for a course during summer 2006.

While in Hawaii, the students had the opportunity to interview internment victims, Pearl Harbor survivors and men from the 100th Battalion. When the students returned to Indiana, they separated into groups and created a plan to honor the people from the three populations they met on the trip. Inspired by what they learned and observed in Hawaii, the students worked elements of Asian culture into the design. Stouse's goal was for the students to take artistic and cultural elements they had observed in Hawaii -- that would not only reflect the culture but also the concept of peace and the people -- and incorporate them into a design for the community to enjoy.

After the initial design phase, the students created one plan for a Peace Garden that featured elements from each group in the class to create a project that was later carried out by Stouse's future students.

The design incorporated pillars, which students observed at the Japanese Cultural Center in Hawaii. The pillars were ballast stones that had been carved by indentured servants who left Japan for Hawaii. The 10 pillars in the Peace Garden are each inscribed with one virtue that represents an aspect of a peaceful life. Each student in the class selected a virtue for a pillar that represented his or her personality.



Stouse in the Peace Garden

Flowers reminiscent of Asian gardens are planted around the garden and include zebra grass, juniper, Japanese maples, foxtail, bayberry, hydrangeas and hibiscus. In the center of the garden is the solar powered water fountain, which Stouse says typically appears in the center of an Asian garden. Three wooden benches surround the garden -- each representing one of the three cultures the students studied in Hawaii.

The flag flying from the pole outside the rim of the garden honors the survivors of Pearl Harbor. The flag once flew over the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor, and was purchased with money from an Indiana Campus Compact grant that IU Kokomo senior Cayce Arnett wrote.

Arnett, who is majoring in English with a minor in international studies, was one of the students in the class who traveled to Hawaii when she was a freshman at IU Kokomo. Arnett said the trip and the project helped her gain an experience she cannot obtain from a book. Meeting the men of the 100th Battalion was one experience in Hawaii that had a great impact on Arnett who says the trip was the first she'd taken outside of the Indiana region.

"What I learned from this experience can't really be put into words," Arnett said. "That class and that trip set the stage for the rest of my education and the rest of my life. I learned so much, and I've gained so much from the opportunity to go to Hawaii and from putting something permanent in our community. "

Arnett said traveling gave her an incredible feeling and allowed her to experience another culture. Ever since the trip, she has taken every opportunity the campus offered to travel, including trips to Italy, England and New York City.

"And I thank Karla for all of that because without traveling to Hawaii and without seeing other cultures and the impact that travel has on you, I don't think I ever would've known how important that is," Arnett said. "I couldn't have taken that with me without the trip and that class."

The Peace Garden has been a good learning experience for other students as well and gave them the opportunity to work with a variety of IU Kokomo staff. Minda Douglas, lecturer in fine arts, inspired Stouse to make a model of the plan, which was presented to a Kokomo Parks and Recreation Department meeting. The board liked the idea of the garden and approved the students' project.

During the past two years, students have worked with Stouse to write grant proposals, manage budgets, attend board meetings and obtain approval from the city for the project. The most recent addition to the garden has been the August 2008 installation of a sidewalk around the outside of the garden. Stouse said Catherine Barnes, director of IU Kokomo's Office of Campus Climate, and students from the Multicultural Student Organization at IU Kokomo provided the funding for the first phase of the sidewalk. Future students must work to obtain more money to complete the final phase of sidewalk construction.

The project was important for the students, Stouse said, because they learned much about a time period of American history of which they were not aware. They did not know about the internment camps or about the contributions of the men from the 100th Battalion. Not only did they learn about a piece of America's history, but they also learned key skills that will aid them in future jobs. Stuart Green, IU Kokomo interim chancellor, says the project helps transform undergraduates into engaged citizens, which is the core of the project.

"Service learning is something that is often misunderstood," Green said. "It's often seen as little kinds of projects that really don't connect what students are learning to anything other than helping the community solve a need. The idea about service learning that I think comes to life in this project -- which is so important -- resonates with a theme our campus has had now for some time, the idea of 'creating knowledge that works.' The idea here is that you take students' experiences and knowledge and translate them into activities that not only impact the community but also help the students understand how to use that knowledge and in the use of that knowledge they become engaged students and successful individuals way beyond the core curriculum of the class."

The IU Kokomo students hope the community will benefit from the garden. They installed a time capsule just outside the perimeter of the Peace Garden under the American flag, which the community can open in 25 years.

Students from Darrough Chapel Elementary School will visit the Peace Garden periodically to perform some routine maintenance and weeding of the garden. Students in one of Stouse's 2007 classes wrote educational modules for the students to understand the concept of the garden. Future IU Kokomo freshmen learning community students will also continue to maintain and enhance the garden.

"Our learning community is about love and relationships, including civic relationships," Stouse said. "That certainly fits with what we're doing there. We hope that this will be a model for other educators in the area who decide to take on relatively small projects with their classes and demonstrate to the students that they

can make an impact on the community. My point to students is it doesn't take a lot to make a significant difference."