

Phillips, Wisconsin - A two year restoration project of a grass roots environment has just been completed at Fred Smith's Wisconsin Concrete Park. With funds from Kohler Foundation, Inc., the Wisconsin Arts Board, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Anne-Marie Foundation of Phillips, Wisconsin, the park, containing 250 concrete and glass statues depicting northwoods animals, folk heroes, patriotic figures, and local events, has been totally restored by conservators Don and Sharron Howlett, and is maintained by Price County as a county park.

The success of this project is amazing in light of the fact that a severe storm nearly destroyed the Wisconsin Concrete Park on July 4th, 1977, only 5 months after restoration had begun. The barn and studio, and over 300 pine trees in the heavily wooded park were blown down, not only causing extensive damage to the statues as they fell, but also drastically altering the environment. In addition to the actual statue restoration, a major landscaping project was also completed by the conservators.

If the storm can be said to have had any advantage, it was that since nearly every figure was broken open, the conservators had complete access to the rotted wood armatures, and they were able to correct this major structural problem by replacing wood with steel. The Howletts also worked with Sika Chemical Corporation engineers and products, using a variety of bonders and epoxies,

for reassembly of shattered or cracked pieces. Matching colored mortars were donated by Medusa Cement Company. Early photo documentation was obtained from Jim Zanzi and Robert Amft, both of Chicago.

Rarely does a project involving conservators, federal, state, county, industrial, and private support meet with the kind of cooperation that made this project a success. The Fred Smith Wisconsin Concrete Park Project sets a precedent for the restoration of other grass roots sites throughout the United States. Many need attention immediately.