

Statue of Truth set to be cast in bronze

By PHOEBE MITCHELL
Staff Writer

NORTHAMPTON — The Denver sculptor creating a statue of Sojourner Truth, a legendary abolitionist and feminist who lived in Florence, is preparing to cast the statue in bronze.

Nancy Felton, chairwoman of the Sojourner Truth Memorial Statue Committee, said this week that Thomas Jay Warren has finished a model of Truth's figure and will next cast it in bronze.

"I feel terrific. "I'm so excited," said Felton. "I think it will speak to people of Sojourner Truth. It has her strength and her character."

Warren has created many monuments and memorials, including one of Medgar Evers in Jackson, Miss., and a life-size bronze statue of Martin Luther King Jr. in Newark, N.J.

The sculpture, which will be slightly larger than life-size, will grace a small, triangular park at the corner of Pine and Park Streets in Florence, at a site recently approved by the city's Board of Public Works.

The Northampton City Council is expected to consider a resolution formally accepting the gift of the statue next year.

Nancy Denig, a Northampton landscape architect, and her associates, Martin Ringey & Heather Cruddace, designed the site.

"Our goal is to create not only a sculpture setting, but a place that will be pleasant to visit," said Denig.

The sculpture will sit on an 8-inch-high, pedestal of gray granite near the park's center within a square, stone terrace, facing Park Street at

a slight angle.

The terrace will be framed on three sides by large granite slabs that can be used for seating. The area will include extensive plantings.

"It's a place where people will be able to sit and enjoy the park," said Denig, but still large enough to accommodate school groups.

One granite walkway will lead to the statue from Park Street, and another to a smaller, square terrace on the east side of the triangle park, where people can also sit, she said.

Three bronze plaques in the park will have information about Truth, slavery, the abolitionist movement and the Northampton Association of Education and Industry, the 1840-era utopian community on Park Street, of which Truth was a member.

"It's a great opportunity to not only introduce Sojourner Truth, but also the context in which she lived, the years she lived in Florence and the causes she espoused," said Denig.

Site work is due to start next spring, with the statue to be unveiled in June.

A \$100,000 state grant and another \$100,000 raised by the committee will pay for the project. Warren will receive a total of \$100,000. The committee will provide the city with money for maintenance of the park and statue.

Funds are still needed to cover the costs of excavating the site, installing the statue and stonework, and landscaping the memorial.

Donations may be sent to Sojourner Truth Memorial Statue Committee, P.O. Box 60405, Florence 01062. More information may be found at www.noho.com/sojourner.