

Historic CdA carousel finally finds new home

Scott Maben/SR

Coeur d'Alene's historic carnival carousel has sat in storage for four years, awaiting a new home.

Now it has one. The 1922 Stillman will be reassembled next to Memorial Field, not far from where it was part of a lakefront amusement park at Independence Point more than 40 years ago.

"We are really just delighted that it's finally come to fruition," said Rita Sims-Snyder of the Coeur d'Alene Carousel Foundation. "It's going to be a pretty special place."

The goal is to have the carousel up and running next year. It will be a seasonal attraction, open April 1 through Oct. 3.

The Coeur d'Alene City Council this week approved a lease agreement for the carousel to sit on 3,200 square feet of land within an area slated for redevelopment in what's called the Four Corners project.

The carousel will sit in a new landscaped plaza across Mullan Road from City Park. The city also is looking at realigning Mullan, taking it down to two lanes and making it safer for pedestrians to cross between the park and new plaza.

"This will be a nice plaza, coming down Northwest Boulevard," said Steve Anthony, the city parks and recreation director. "It will be a safe location, with Mullan Road being cut down to two lanes."

The foundation is raising money to construct a small building to house the carousel and to cover maintenance and operating costs. Local businessman and philanthropist Charles "Bud" Ford has pledged \$500,000 in matching funds to the project, with a fundraising deadline of Dec. 31.

The foundation looked at several areas where the attraction might go, including the Riverstone development to the north.

"We just had to be patient, and we just kept searching and investigating other options," Sims-Snyder said.

The location is fitting, Sims-Snyder said, because of the historic character of the Fort Grounds neighborhood. The carousel will sit next to Memorial Field's old wood grandstand and across the street from the historic railroad battery building that's now home to the Human Rights Education Institute.

"It creates this little historic heart," she said. "It harkens back to the history of our area."

Built by Stillman Engineering Corp. in North Tonawanda, New York, the carousel entertained children and families at Playland Pier near downtown from the 1940s to the 1970s. Playland also had a Ferris wheel, roller coaster, penny arcade and other attractions. By 1975, it was shuttered, and fire tore through it one night that December.

But the 20-horse carousel survived the blaze, and for many years it was operated as a traveling display through the U.S. and Canada.

An Oregon couple bought the carousel in 1987 and restored it, and in 2011 retired real estate developer John Foote and his wife, Pat, paid \$250,000 for it and gave it back to Coeur d'Alene.

The Spillman has a 32-foot diameter on the deck, making it about half the size of the Loeff Carrousel in Spokane's Riverfront Park.

Sims-Snyder estimates it will take at least \$410,000 to get the new carousel building up and running.

To make a tax-deductible donation to the project, go to cdacarousel.org or send it to the Coeur d'Alene Carousel Foundation, P.O. Box 170, Coeur d'Alene, 83816.