

Embracing the past New Melle erects a statue that honors its settlers.

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Body

The Germans are coming.

Several German officials and citizens are coming to **New Melle** to **honor** the immigrants who stumbled upon a rolling 40-acre stretch of St. Charles County and settled it as their hometown in 1839.

The officials will be here for a ceremony Saturday to dedicate an 8 1/2-foot-tall bronze **statue** that illustrates **New Melle's** ties to its sister city of **Melle**, Germany.

"**Embracing** the **past** into the present is the only way to keep history alive," said JoAnn Hammel, who led the fundraising drive for the **statue**. "Otherwise, it goes by the wayside."

The **statue** symbolizes the German immigrants who settled in the area more than 160 years ago. A sculptor who lives near **Melle**, Germany, crafted it. It is similar to a **statue** in the **Melle** marketplace in Germany. There, the **statue** of a woman with her child standing atop a pedestal with images of flax flowers represents women's contribution to the family. **New Melle's statue** is different because it **honors** the women and children who helped fuel the linen industry before the Industrial Revolution.

Hammel, a member of the **New Melle-Melle** Friendship Society, which travels to **Melle** and hosts Germans every few years, said the group has raised about \$52,000 of the \$90,000 cost of the **statue**.

The mayor of **Melle**, Germany, will arrive today, Hammel said, and two officials with the German Embassy in the United States will arrive Saturday morning. They will be joined by **New Melle** city officials, state Sen. Jon Dolan, R-Lake Saint Louis, and state Rep. Kevin Threlkeld, R-Washington.

The Friendship Society has raised money for the **statue** by selling engraved bricks between \$250 and \$500 each to be placed around the base of the **statue**. The group has also been selling commemorative engravings for \$1,000 and bronze plaques for \$1,200. The group is seeking donations from corporate sponsors as well.

Historical reflection

The **statue** depicts a woman and child clutching a basket of bread and standing atop an open book, representing the Bible and history. The year 1839 is engraved on the book's spine, along with maps of Germany and the United States. Together, the mother and child gaze over **New Melle** in an open field next to St. Paul's Lutheran Church. The field was once a cemetery used by the immigrant community.

New Melle Mayor Joe Nolkemper credited the Friendship Society for its efforts and said he views the **statue** as a historical reflection of all immigrants who came to the United States in the 19th century -- not just Germans.

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"These people came to the United States seeking a better way to live and they realized they had to take the blue-collar jobs to start a life for their family," Nolkemper said. "These are the people of your past, and you can't ever forget them."

Organizers of the project hope the statue will help future generations of New Melle residents understand their roots.

"We are a young country," Hammel said. "We need to preserve our history so that 600 years from now, we still know the story."

Dedication in New Melle

What: An 8 1/2-foot-tall statue symbolizing the combined history of New Melle, in St. Charles County, and Melle, Germany. When: 1:30 p.m. Saturday.

Where: St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 150 West Highway D, New Melle.

Cost: Free.

Information: JoAnn Hammel at 636-398-5952.

Graphic

PHOTO

PHOTO - The new statue in New Melle looks out over the landscape near St. Paul's Lutheran Church. A delegation of visitors from Melle, Germany, which is New Melle's sister city, will be on hand for the dedication ceremony Saturday. Huy Richard Mach | Post-Dispatch

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