

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Around Lamoni

Jefferson Highway Comes to Life

(Pictured: Jefferson Highway markers begin to appear around Lamoni.)

Around Lamoni, it's beginning to look a lot like Jefferson Highway everywhere you go. It wasn't too long ago that a Lamoni Mayor's Proclamation declared May 23rd Drive Jefferson Highway Day in Lamoni to explore the highway and learn more about its history and significance both locally and nationally. On that day, Leon-based filmmakers Josiah Laubenstein and Iowa native Darrell Johnston, who grew up in Leon and graduated from Graceland University in 2010, drove their maroon 1954 Chevy into Lamoni and shot scenes of the highway in the community. Their documentary, *Less Traveled: A Journey from Pine to Palm*, included scenes from their visit and was shown at the Coliseum last Thursday.



The Jefferson highway winds 2300 miles from Winnipeg to New Orleans. Dedicated in July 1916, it was the nation's first north south interstate (international) highway. "One hundred years later, the highway continues to unite residents and communities along its path," Mayor Doug Foster said. "In addition to celebrating its centennial year, Lamoni plans to feature this historic roadway as both a tribute to its important contribution to our nation and as an important tourist attraction."

The purpose of the highway was to encourage travel and commerce between cities along the way and promote farm to market roads. Unlike today's super highways which maximize speed, bypassing communities large and small, the Jefferson Highway was routed so that travelers 100 years ago passed through as many cities as possible.

Community utility poles are being painted with the Jefferson Highway Historical marker along the Lamoni route. The markers are eight feet off the ground with 12 inches of white and the letters JH centered between two eight inches of blue. "In addition, we expect Jefferson Highway memorabilia will become a part of Lamoni stores' merchandise as tourist begin to follow what was once called the Pines to Palms Highway," City Administrator Barb Stuck said.



When this phrase is first spoken in the documentary, an argument begins and runs throughout the film: “Palms to Pines Highway.”

“Pines to Palms Highway,” would be volleyed back.

And again: “Palms to Pines Highway.”

Back and forth it went until a marker in Louisiana indicated the end of the Jefferson Highway. “Pines to Palms Highway.”

“It’s been a hundred-year-old argument depending on where you live,” Stuck went on, “but whatever it’s called, we expect it will become the north-south attraction similar to what the east-west Highway Route 66 is for road enthusiasts,” Stuck said. “We’re really excited about an idea Karen Gergely, Graceland University Assistant Professor of Art, proposed. Karen suggested creating an art object to celebrate the highway.”

“I became really interested in the Jefferson Highway and its history to the area – Lamoni specifically – while riding RAGBRAI this summer,” Gergely said. “Leon’s SCIT Theatre hosted a teaser trailer of the documentary and Darrell Johnston was there to discuss the journey and the process.” Gergely proposed a mural in town that was welcomed with enthusiasm and support from Graceland University and the community leaders. “The mural will be a journey, one that I am excited to share with many folks as we create something special and meaningful to the town we care for and invest so heavily in,” Gergely said.

Gergely envisions it as a true collaboration between the people of Lamoni, GU, and all who are working to make the Jefferson Highway a destination journey. “We see it as a way to draw travelers off of Interstate 35 into Lamoni to spend time here, get to know our community, and make it a priority to come back and bring friends,” Gergely said!

“Not only are we beginning to see the Jefferson Highway unite residents within communities,” Judy Harris, Deputy City Administrator, said. “We’re also experiencing the roadway linking communities together. Plans are now being considered to organize a 60-mile yard sale from Osceola to Bethany in the near future.

In 1916 the Jefferson Highway connected America – that connection takes on an entirely new meaning in the 21st century. “Heritage tourists are rediscovering the Jefferson Highway,” Lamoni Mayor Doug Foster said, “and we want Lamoni to be one of the communities along their way.” Like the old song says:

“If you want to see America from head to toe,
The Jefferson Highway is the way to go.”

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