



The Bear Dancers Sculpture Completes Civic Plaza

World-Renowned Artist Honors Ute Tribal Nations' Annual Spring Celebration

Steamboat Springs, Colorado-November 17, 2025-Early this month, the City of Steamboat Springs, Steamboat Creates and artists from the [Southern Ute Indian Tribe](#) celebrated the installation of the third and final public art piece within the recently completed downtown Civic Plaza.

The city commissioned Southern Ute artist, Oreland Joe Sr., to create a piece that represents the shared heritage of the Yampa Valley's Ute Tribal and Indigenous associations. Oreland Joe Sr. is world-renowned for his work in stone and bronze sculptures.

"The city recognizes that the Ute people have stewarded the land, water, plants, and wildlife of the Yampa Valley since time immemorial," said Deputy City Manager Kelly Romero-Heaney. "As a municipal government, we are committed to expanding our role in connecting with the Ute Tribal Nations through government-to-government and community engagement to facilitate open dialogue."



Artistic expression has been utilized throughout time to not only document history and share stories of the past, but as a physical medium that brings peoples from different backgrounds together to promote a shared interpretation of unique cultural traditions.

The acquisition of The Bear Dancers provides an opportunity for the city and its residents to connect in meaningful ways with the Yampa Valley's Ute heritage and people. Romero-Heaney said the city aims to learn from and honor the Ute people through artistic collaboration and renewed consultation, fostering relationships that support accurate representation and future dialogue.

Oreland completed the sculpture The Bear Dancers in honor of the annual celebration shared by all three Ute Tribal Nations. Carved from Indiana limestone, the piece depicts male and female Southern Ute Tribal members participating in the traditional Bear Dance, which is celebrated in late spring to mark the changing seasons.

The dance originates from a Ute story in which two brothers encountered a bear dancing and clawing a tree; the bear taught one brother the dance and its songs to share with his people. Honoring the bear's spirit as a symbol of strength and respect, the Bear Dance serves as a communal celebration of renewal after the long winter, and the city looks forward to Oreland's return for a larger spring ceremony.

The city's public art program aids in creating a sense of place throughout Steamboat Springs public places by enhancing the visual environment with a wide-range of mediums – from donated memorials honoring Olympians, to community envisioned murals, and commissioned site-specific pieces.

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