Burial mound rocks moved

By Patrick McCreless
The Anniston Star

OXFORD — History is on the move in Oxford.

Dump trucks loaded with stones from atop a hill behind a shopping center transported their cargo to a site across Leon Smith Parkway on Thursday. The move fulfilled part of an agreement between Oxford and a federally recognized American Indian tribe — an agreement the city needed to proceed with a construction project at the site.

It also represented the end of a nearly three-year-long controversy regarding the city's treatment of an alleged ancient Indian stone burial mound.

Fred Denney, Oxford's city project manager, said the transport of rocks from the hill to an adjacent site near the city's proposed sports complex was part of Oxford's memorandum of agreement with the Muscogee Creek Nation in Oklahoma, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Alabama Historical Commission.

"Yeah, we're moving the rocks ... it should be finished (Monday)," Denney said.

A backhoe could be clearly seen atop the hill at noon Thursday, filling a dump truck with rocks.

Controversy over whether the hill behind the Oxford Exchange was used as an ancient American Indian burial mound arose nearly three years ago when Oxford started digging out dirt underneath it to use as fill for a proposed Sam's Club nearby. Due to the controversy, the city eventually halted work at the hill, where it remained untouched until now.

Under the agreement, approved in June, the city had to move the stones to an undisclosed location where ancient American Indian remains were discovered last year during construction of the sports complex. At the site, the city must use the rocks to construct a mound approximately 32 meters by 16 meters by 1.6 meters.

The corps halted the sports complex project in February 2010 after the human remains were found at the site, located at the historic Davis Farms. The corps has jurisdiction over the site since Oxford needed a wetlands permit to begin construction. The corps would not allow the project to continue until the Muscogee Creeks, which has the closest cultural affiliation to the site, decided what to do with the remains.

The Muscogee Creeks eventually decided the remains should be reburied and the stones from the hill be relocated nearby.

Stacye Hathorn, state archaeologist for the Alabama Historical Commission, said the city has done well in fulfilling its side of the agreement.

"I'm pleased with the agreement we have," she said.

Once the stones are moved, the city has the go-ahead from the Muscogee Creeks to do whatever it wants with the land behind the shopping center. The City Council has not discussed any possible uses of the land since the agreement was signed.

Denney said he did not know of any plans in the works.

Arts school offers 'break' for parents

The International School of the Performing Arts is hosting "Parents Break" to provide care for kids while school is out over the holidays.

"When my kids were younger, it was a dilemma for me," said Denise Dukes, founder and artistic director. "What am I going to do with my children for the next two weeks?"

Dukes said the goal of her program, which started Friday evening, is to engage children through creative activities while parents are working, shopping or attending holiday gatherings.

"We have a slew of activities (planned) including drama, a lot of drama exercises, drama games in which they act out certain parts and give them certain situations and scenarios," Dukes said.

She said there also will be Christmas karaoke and dance and fitness classes. She said the cost per day is $25 and includes a meal and a snack. Three full-time office staffers and three volunteers will man the program. Dukes said there are 20 spaces available each day and parents should call in advance to secure a spot.

The program will be available during the day Monday through Thursday and Dec. 26 though Dec. 29 and available in the evenings Friday, Dec. 30 and Dec. 31. It's open to children ages 6 to 15 and is located at the performing arts school, 1270 Perry Hill Road.

For more information, call 334-715-0911.

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