



PHOTOS: LYNN ARMITAGE

# ABIGGER STORY TOTELL

By Lynn Armitage

Next time you're driving westbound on Interstate 94, near Ho-Chunk Gaming Madison, picture this: a sprawling, state-of-the-art sports and entertainment complex that rivals the best of them, luring throngs of enthusiastic visitors to the gateway of Madison like fans to a Badger football game.

Can you see it?

Dan Brown certainly can. The executive manager of Ho-Chunk Gaming Madison has held a vision for many years to develop 47.75 acres of vacant, tribally owned land adjacent to the casino. With all that undeveloped land and money to build, it's just a matter of finding the big idea—and the right partners.

"We considered building a big-box retail store, an industrial park and even a corporate headquarters," says Brown, who hired Urban Assets, a local planning and community development firm, to conduct a high-level study on what type of development made the most sense for both the Ho-Chunk Nation and the city of Madison. "At the end of the day, we are looking for a regional destination," as well as an opportunity to share the Ho-Chunk's unique heritage as the original inhabitants of the Madison area, he says. "We aren't just a casino on the outskirts of town. This is our homeland, and we have a bigger story to tell."

While on the hunt for development options, Brown and his team heard

repeatedly from community members and public officials that there weren't enough fields for rugby, soccer, lacrosse and other youth sports. The west side of Madison has Reddan Field in Verona, but the east side is sorely lacking. "We understand that some teams have to drive all the way to the Dells just for practices," Brown says.

And so, the big idea was born: The tribe would build a much-needed sporting event complex for the city featuring indoor and outdoor playing fields, a cultural center that spotlights the rich history of the Ho-Chunk people, a hotel, a parking structure and possibly a conference center, too.

The beauty of this venture, according to Brown, is that it offers an opportunity to collaborate with the city. Preliminary plans call for the indoor fields to be built on Ho-Chunk land, and the twelve contiguous outdoor fields to be constructed on part of the thirty-six-hole Yahara Hills Golf Course—City of Madison Parks Department property that abuts the tribe's property.

"The city will have to make a decision on whether they want to surrender some

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DAN BROWN

## INDIGENOUS MADISON

to know the history," says Rice. "But it's not easy."



### BY THE TIME KENNY WHITEHORSE

was growing up, the stories of his people's history, equal parts brutal and triumphant, lived and breathed in the Ho-Chunk gatherings that continue to this day. He recalls bonfires and powwows where the Whitehorses gathered regularly with other Ho-Chunk families in the area. The Funmakers, the WhiteEagles, the Whitewings, the Longtails, the Clevelandes, the Greengrasses. All of the families were so talented and smart, says Kenny, so distinguished. So athletic, so respectfully competitive, so humble. So many great silversmiths, leatherworkers, beaders and basketmakers. The women wove baskets from bark stripped and sized by the men, dying and stretching them into shape. Each probably took two weeks to make, and the big ones brought in about \$30 apiece. Kenny says a footnote line in the Monona Heritage Almanac refers to "some Indians sold goods at the base of Monona Drive," and that was them, he laughs. His family.

And then there's his uncle—father in Ho-Chunk tradition—Harry, arguably the most talented artist of them all. For the longest time, the family didn't know about Harry's talent because his grade school teachers kept his work for their own walls—and Harry went to the Cole School of Art and became a highly respected and successful artist.

In Harry's art, the Ho-Chunk culture is everywhere, and the art is infused throughout this home and the Four Lakes. There are so many pieces and installations that it's hard to keep track of them all. The Ho-Chunk Family Tree carving at Thoreau School. The Fitchburg Veterans Memorial at Gorman Park. Asclepius, the Greek god of healing, out in front of the Physicians Plus clinic not even a quarter-mile down the road, peeking from the overgrown brush, arms forever outstretched to the sky. Here in the house, just inside the front door, an exquisite silver crane is perched—but it's only a model; Harry sold its larger original to a high school. He doesn't remember which one. "I get a little emotional when I hear these folks talk about when they were young," says Kenny, a UW-Madison graduate who taught school here in town for twenty-five years, and at Indian schools before that. He tried to instill in his students the importance



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of the holes for the project," says Brown. "We would not necessarily pursue the sports complex portion of the project unless we get a full commitment from the city to build the adjacent outdoor fields."

So far, it appears that the city and other key players, including Madison tourism, planning and parks executives, are enthusiastic about doing business with the Ho-Chunk tribe, but there are many details and contingencies yet to work out, according to Madison Parks superintendent Eric Knepp. "The city is a little more guarded. We don't say 'yes' to doing something until we have a solid master plan coming from our side." And Knepp says the city has done very little in that regard.

Currently, one of the biggest issues facing the city is funding. "We are committed to working with the Ho-Chunk tribe because that's what good neighbors do, as we have a mutual interest in a successful gateway to the city," says Knepp. "But we really haven't talked money yet, the heavy lift, and getting to that point will be when the real commitment comes from the city."

Jamie Patrick, vice president of the Madison Area Sports Commission, a nonprofit organization that brings sporting events to Dane County, believes a sports complex is just what the city needs. "We'd be able to attract regional, national and international tournaments, which would help fill up our hotels and restaurants," says Patrick. Plus, it would solve the field-shortage problem. "If we can hit those two things on the head, we have a winner on our hands—as long as it is done right, built right and managed right."

To keep the momentum for the project moving toward the tribe's goal of a potential first-phase opening in 2018, monthly ongoing talks continue between the tribe and city officials. Little by little, progress is being made on the Ho-Chunk's end. Architects are drafting a master conceptual plan, and a wetland delineation report is close to being completed.

"The good news is, we've learned that we are able to build on a vast majority of Ho-Chunk land," says Brown, who was happy to discover that barely five percent of the Ho-Chunk land is actually wetlands. "We were surprised because it's kind of swampy over here."

Still, there are some definite hurdles that will have to be overcome before the project can grow sturdier legs. For one, traffic concerns. Currently, there is only one way in and out of the Ho-Chunk Casino area—a very dangerous intersection at Mill Pond Road and state highways 12/18—so the Wisconsin Department of Transportation has been brought in to the project discussions.

Obviously, building something this ambitious takes time. Perhaps too much time, says Melissa Huggins, a certified planner and principal at Urban Assets who conducted the initial in-depth feasibility study. "Developers come here and say, 'Why can I get stuff done in Chicago and I can't get stuff done in Madison?' We have a very wonderful planning staff, but they hold the developers' feet to the fire."

The parks superintendent jumps to the city's defense. "No one will ever fully appreciate the process the city goes through and how long it takes," says Knepp. "This project feels like it's going somewhere, and it very well could. But planning this much space will just take some time and some process, for sure."

Time has certainly helped heal strained relations between the city and the Ho-Chunk tribe dating back nearly a decade, when Dane County residents opposed a proposed expansion of Ho-Chunk gaming operations. "There are some hangover perceptions about gaming that came up when we were presenting to the parks commission," says Huggins, who also recalls overwhelming support, too. "We just need to do some educating about how gaming fits into the nation and all tribes, and what its role is."

Past history aside, Knepp is encouraged to be working with the Ho-Chunk tribe to create a positive outcome for Madison. "Dan Brown and his leadership have a lot to do with why we are having these conversations," he says.

The Ho-Chunk Nation remains hopeful about the vision for the sports complex and entertainment center. "We have two governments trying to work together, so we don't expect this to happen overnight," Brown says. "I hesitate to use the word 'perfect,' but it sure is coming together nicely."

**LYNN ARMITAGE** is a freelance writer who recently moved from California to Madison.