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Friends of the Welk Homestead discuss interpretive plans

By Nicole Vander Vorst

The Friends of the Welk Homestead group met on Friday, Jan. 11, 2019, following the Tri-County Tourism Alliance meeting at the White Maid Restaurant and Bar in Napoleon.

At the meeting, Robert Hanna, South Region Historic Sites Manager for the State Historical Society of N.D., explained how farming and Lawrence Welk's career can be tied together and explained, as staff gave tours of the Welk farm.

He said that he hopes visitors will remember more of their experience if several sub-themes, including Lawrence's career, the farm history and the Germans from Russia history, are connected to one common "big idea."

"Both Lawrence Welk and his family were trying to achieve the American Dream, but in different ways, which created tension between the old and new ways," Hanna said.

He is putting together an interpretive plan which will include these topics.

State Historical Society of North Dakota may organize focus groups to help develop the interpretive plan. Dr. Tom Isern, Historian for the Friends of the Welk Homestead and North Dakota State University Distinguished Professor of History, said that in one of his NDSU classes, students are required to visit an historic place, and he may be able to also organize a related focus group in one of his classes.



Attending the Tri-County Tourism Alliance and Friends of the Welk Homestead meetings were NDSU staff members, who also visited Schmitt's Locker, left to right, Michael Miller and Jeremy Kopp, Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, Hallie Pritchett, Associate Dean of Libraries and Dr. Tom Isern, Distinguished Professor of History.

Hanna explained that Dr. Tom Isern located 1910 and 1920's auction ads from the Emmons County Record. Hanna then typed and categorized every plow, disc, harrow, drill, header, binder and feed mill into a spreadsheet. Hanna said that the site would like to acquire four farm implements from the Welk time period, that were used in growing small grains. The spreadsheet will help determine which brands and types of implements were most common in the area at the time and guide efforts to get the best possible implements. The goal is to have a garden at the site, and to do demonstrations on the equipment. The garden may be located beside the house, where it is suspected the Welk garden once was.

Also discussed as possible parts of the interpretive plan included; new signs for



Robert Hanna, South Region Historic Sites Manager for the State Historical Society of N.D., explained a new interpretive plan for the Welk site.

the buggy house, building an earthen ramp to replace concrete non-ADA compliant ramps, adding places for guests to sit and read in the living room, and purchasing an AM transmitter that would broadcast a reading to guests at the site during times the site is closed.

Friends of the Welk Homestead officers include, Clarence Herz, president, Michael



Dr. Tom Isern, Historian for the Friends of the Welk Homestead and NDSU Distinguished Professor of History, explained what types of machinery may have been used by the Welks as they homesteaded.

Miller, vice president, Dr. Isern, historian and Allan Burke, secretary/treasurer.

The next meeting for the Friends of the Welk Homestead will be on Friday, Feb. 8, 2019, following the Tri-County Tourism Alliance meeting at Spring Creek Coffee in Linton.



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