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'He changed history. He changed the world'

Public can watch as sculptor finishes statue of Borlaug

By Michael Morain
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The statue of Norman Borlaug is based on a 1960s photo of him, deep in thought — and wheat — in a field in Mexico. SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

Benjamin Victor is making history — with his bare hands. The South Dakota sculptor will be at the State Historical Museum of Iowa for the next two weeks, finishing up a statue of Norman Borlaug for the U.S. Capitol. It will be dedicated next year on March 25, the 100th anniversary of Borlaug's birth.

The statue will be one of two, along with the Civil War-era Gov. Samuel Kirkwood, to represent Iowa in the rotunda's Statuary Hall.

"It's a little scary and humbling because of who he was," Victor said of the late Cresco native, whose crop research made the entire planet more productive. "There's nothing wrong with putting other individuals on a pedestal — athletes, politicians — but he's on a whole 'nother level. He saved over a billion lives. He changed history. He changed the world."

Two years ago, during an unusually contentious season at the Iowa Statehouse, lawmakers found rare common ground on a proposal to honor Borlaug, the Nobel Peace Prize winner and founder of the World Food Prize, with a statue in Washington (replacing the one of the 19th century U.S. Sen. James Harlan). The governor signed the bill, with the state's entire congressional delegation at his side, and appointed a committee to select a sculptor.

Victor lived up to his name, beating out 64 other applicants. He'd already racked up a long list of sculpture credits, including the statue of America's first female attorney, Belle Babb Mansfield, at her alma mater, Iowa Wesleyan College in Mount Pleasant. He also sculpted an earlier addition to Statuary Hall, a 6-foot-4-inch bronze of the Native American activist Sarah Winnemucca for the state

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South Dakota sculptor Benjamin Victor.

SEE THE SCULPTOR AT WORK

Benjamin Victor will work on the Norman Borlaug statue starting today at the State Historical Museum of Iowa. Visitors can stop in and see him 10 a.m.-noon and 2-4 p.m. through Saturday and 2-4 p.m. Sunday through March 28. Free admission. For a full list of the museum's spring break activities and tours — of the ongoing displays on the Civil War, artifact preservation, and Iowa's 99 counties — visit www.iowa-history.org.

ONLINE

Watch a video of sculptor Benjamin Victor setting up inside the museum at DesMoinesRegister.com/Life.



Sculptor Benjamin Victor created more than a dozen clay heads to get Norman Borlaug's expression just right. PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER



