



PHOTO PROVIDED BY FOUNDATION FORWARD

Foundation Forward Inc. builds settings of the United States "Charters of Freedom" — the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights — in towns across the country. Its next project is in downtown Lenoir, and the bases of settings will match the Caldwell County Courthouse.

'A gift the to community'

U.S. founding documents coming to Lenoir

BY VIRGINIA ANNABLE

VANNABLE@NEWSTOPICNEWS.COM

When Vance and Mary Jo Patterson of Morganton saw the U.S. Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution for the first time, they got goosebumps, and a lump swelled in Vance Patterson's throat.

The experience had such a powerful impact that day in 2011 that a year later the couple decided to build a copy of the "Charters of Freedom" — the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights — in the courtyard of the Morganton Courthouse. Two years later, the pages were etched in bronze plaques and atop granite displays for all to see.

Since then, Foundation Forward, the organization the Patterson started, has set up just over a dozen of these displays, which they call settings, all over the country, from North Carolina to Nevada. Another two dozen settings are in the works — including one outside the

Caldwell County Courthouse.

In a few weeks, the founding documents of the United States will stand in downtown Lenoir, serving as a landmark and an educational opportunity, said Perry Snider, operations manager for Foundation Forward.

The three settings will be at the southwest corner of the courthouse, near the downtown square. They will be built with yellow brick to match the courthouse, said Michael Unruh, who handles communications at Foundation Forward.

The foundation aims to be a resource for schools to bring children to see the documents in person because not everyone can go to Washington, D.C., Snider said.

"It allows the community and mostly the school systems and future generations to have hands-on access," he said. "There's a huge difference between (learning about the documents for) one hour in the sixth grade in a civics course, ... as opposed

to a one-hour field trip to see them."

The roughly \$25,000 cost of the settings will be paid for by the foundation and donations. People will also be able to buy memorial bricks on the site to commemorate loved ones, military personnel, first-responders and organizations, Unruh said.

Those who contribute will get their name added to a time capsule that will be placed in a safe under the settings, Unruh said. Along with names of those who donated to the project, the capsule will also include history and memorabilia to capture Caldwell County. The capsule will be opened on July 4, 2076 — the 300th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence.

Unruh said the settings will be built with or without donations, and donations may still be given after to the settings are built.

"This is a gift to the community," he said.

For more information, visit www.chartersoffreedom.com.

Reporter Virginia Annable can be reached at 828-610-8724.