

## SUBURBS

DOUGLAS  
JEFFERSON

## INDIANS' TRIBUTE

Arapahoe  
park honors  
two tribes

By Alan Snel

Denver Post Staff Writer

**A**RAPAHOE COUNTY — Native American artist Bently Spang strolled along the circular, red-gravel path looping the county's newest park.

Spang, a northern Cheyenne who spent some of his childhood on a southeast Montana reservation, felt at home at this 2½-acre park on East Iowa Avenue, about a half-mile east of Parker Road.

The Tsistsistas/Hinonoei Park opened last month as the metro area's first park to pay tribute to the nomadic Plains Indians such as the Cheyennes and Arapahos who lived in the region, said Cameron Wolfe, an architect who worked with Littleton landscape architect Doug Rockne on crafting the park.

"We tried to evoke an atmosphere of serenity," Wolfe said. "We wanted to evoke something of the relationship with nature. It's a contemplative, not recreational, park."

"Native Americans were so close to the Earth. We wanted something that would really express that harmony."

Spang is working on the park's artistic centerpiece — a sculpture of steel and wood that will have a contemporary feel but also conjure up traditional Native American values.

The artist, earning a master's degree at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, already has erected a 15-foot-tall tree fashioned from 3,000 pounds of steel.

## Mother inspires

Spang said the inspiration for the sculpture came from his mother's admiration of such trees. The steel tree even has an opening at the top to show a lightning strike.

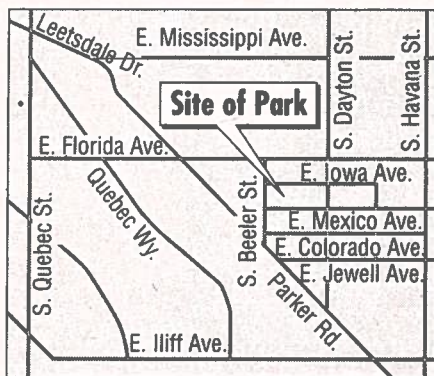
The tree's limbs will support four 35-foot wooden poles. One set will point north toward the Cheyennes in Montana and the Arapahos in Wyoming. Another set will point southeast toward the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes of Oklahoma.

One end of each of the poles will support 6-by-8 foot forms in the shape of a package that



The Denver Post / Brian Brainerd

**ARTIST:** Bently Spang with his work in progress, a sculpture honoring the Cheyenne/Arapaho Indians, at the new park.



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Cameron Wolfe, architect

will look like a travois, the device the Plains Indians used to haul their belongings.

"The whole piece is about movement and what supported that history of movement," Spang said. He is a former pipe fitter, with undergraduate business and art degrees from Montana State in Billings.

Spang has entitled the work, "Hoxovestave," the Cheyenne word for "Journey Across Country." The county will dedicate the park and the artwork officially June 8, which hap-

pens to be Spang's birthday.

The park also includes the work of another artist — Telluride Institute-based poet Lance Hanson. He wrote two poems just for the park that were engraved in sandstone tablets there. The poems also address the sense of place.

## Site transformed

The park, which is about a football field wide, looks nothing like the site before work began two years ago. The county bought the land for its

park district in 1986. The site included an abandoned home, tree stumps and weeds.

But after spending \$154,900, Arapahoe County has converted the once-ugly site into an educational park that will include landscape such as cottonwood trees, sage bushes, purple corn blossom flowers and buffalo grass. Two knolls of wildflowers should be in full bloom by the spring, Wolfe said.

The circular loop represents the eternal circle of life. The

path includes a section that was built into a ring of large rocks, with each rock representing a compass direction. Vegetation will be native flora and plants that the tribes used for ritual and medicinal purposes.

Spang said the path's crushed red gravel reminds him of the red shale of his Montana hometown. Nearby magpies, birds that were part of traditional Cheyenne creation stories, give the site a native feel, the artist said.

Rockne, the landscape architect, won the job from the county in 1993 to design the new park.

Rockne and Wolfe talked with at least 10 Native Americans to gather information for the park. Their idea for a Plains Indians park then drew support from county commissioners.

"Nothing like this has ever been done," Wolfe said. "Arapahoe County took a bold step in doing this."