

Building a labrynth

By Andrew Amelinckx

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When one hears the word labyrinth, one might think of the 1980s film that starred David Bowie, or perhaps the Greek myth involving the Minotaur and Theseus. But in the village of Philmont residents will likely be thinking of Walking the Dog Theater and the village park.

A labyrinth is currently under construction in the village of Philmont thanks to David Anderson and Benedicta Bertau, theater directors for Walking the Dog Theater in Ghent.

England's Emerson College, where the two met in 1994, led both to the founding of the theater and by extension was the impetus for the labyrinth.

According to Bertau, seven years ago a group of friends from Emerson held a reunion at the college and decided to get together again seven years later.

"We felt this next one should have a service element," she said. "We immediately thought of Columbia County."

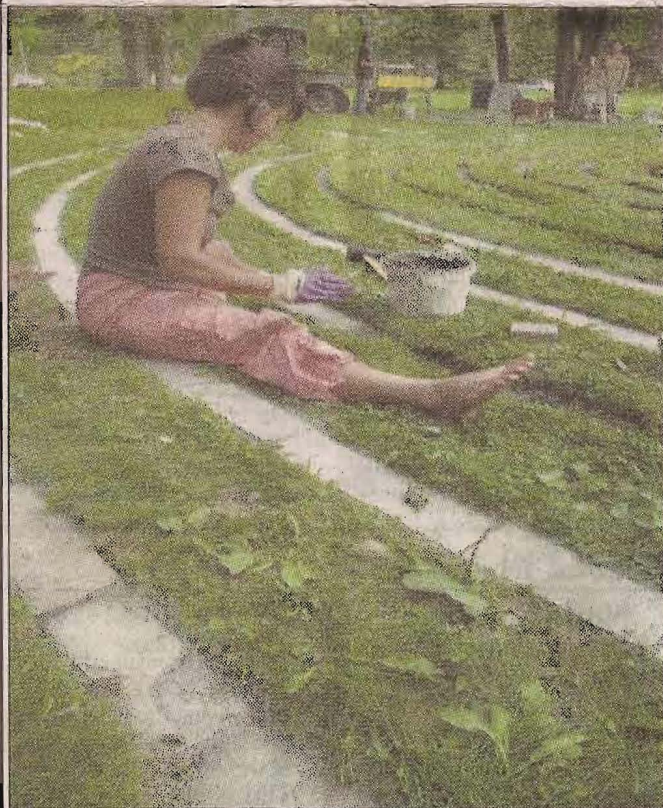
They decided to build a labyrinth, 42 feet in diameter, in the Philmont Village Park.

Labyrinths are maze like structures with a history stretching back thousands of years and have been used for spiritual contemplation, among many uses. But unlike mazes, which have a number of choices of paths and directions, a labyrinth does not. There is only one path in and out.

They chose to base theirs on a famous example found on the floor of Chartres Cathedral near Paris, France.

Anderson said they visited the original before beginning work on theirs.

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Kim Murriera, from Hawaii, lays stone in one of the outer rings of the labyrinth.



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Walking the Dog Theater Executive Artistic Director David Anderson is the official stone cutter for the labyrinth project going on in Philmont.



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Roman Kuznetsov, from Russia, tries to plot out the central circles for the labyrinth in Philmont. Kuznetsov is one 12 alumni of Emerson College in England who are spearheading the labyrinth project.

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"It was absolutely a moving experience for us," he said, "and we wanted to provide that experience for others."

Anderson said it takes 15 minutes to walk the labyrinth in Chartres.

"It's a meditative path, he said. "It means a lot to many people."

The original was built in A.D. 1200 and was sometimes walked for repentance and as such would be done on the knees.

The one being built in Philmont began with a "three or four month planning phase" according to Bertau. "It's a complicated geometric pattern."

Twelve friends from around the world, including Australia, Hawaii, Germany and Latvia, have come to the area for a week to build the labyrinth, with the help of the community and others.

"I'm here to build a labyrinth," said Vintra Puke from Latvia, adding that it was also a chance to see her friends.

On her first trip to the United States she's enjoying the work but said that it "is not so easy."

The process of building the labyrinth, which is flush to the ground, involves digging a three-inch trench, adding stone dust and then laying the stone down.

According to Anderson and

Bertau, the project couldn't have happened without Tim Smith, a local stone mason, and Linda Gatter, an architect and owner of the restaurant Local 111.

"Linda was very excited about it," said Bertau.

Three youths who smashed the marble floor of the historic Tea House at Harder Mansion, located near the site of the labyrinth, are also helping on the project as part of their sentence.

Some of the damaged marble will find its way into the labyrinth as well.

They chose Philmont for a number of reasons, including its location.

"Philmont is the heart of Columbia County," Bertau said.

She also feels that the village was "very open to beautification."

According to Anderson, area residents had been coming out, offering the workers lemonade and pitching in for an hour or two.

Village trustee Robin Andrews, who was there Wednesday lending a hand, said that the village had queried residents on the project before moving forward.

"There was not one person who didn't think it was a good idea," she said.

Andrews said she helped oversee a group of students from the Workforce Initiative.

"We spent the last week

digging up sod," she said.

Andrews feels the labyrinth could bring more people to the village, which she believes is becoming a center for dining and activities.

"It's a great project," she said.

Another person lending a hand Wednesday was Myriam Valle, a resident who lives on the Philmont-Claverack border.

"I wanted to participate in the life of this town," she said. "I came to do whatever they needed done."

Valle moved to the area from New York City around five years ago.

She liked the fact that the project was both unusual and for the beautification of the village.

The labyrinth will be dedicated Saturday at 2 p.m.

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