

# SAVAGE Pacer



## Sculpture of racehorse Dan Patch proposed for state fairgrounds

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Dan Patch — the legendary standardbred pacer who broke a world record in 1906 with his 1:55 mile — could be greeting Minnesota State Fairgoers next summer.

Efforts are under way to install a bronze sculpture of Dan Patch on the Minnesota State Fairgrounds — where the iconic horse broke the record — and a smaller sculpture outside the Savage Library. The sculpture in Savage would also feature Dan Patch's owner, Marion W. Savage, and focus on Savage's achievements and contributions to the city.

The goal is to have the State Fair sculpture installed by Aug. 1 of next year so it could be unveiled at the 2016 Fair — in time for 110th anniversary of the record being broken. Organizers also hope to have the library sculpture installed around the same time.

### HOW IT STARTED

While city officials — including Savage Mayor Janet Williams — have long said that the Savage could use a statue dedicated to Dan Patch and Marion W. Savage, it was an out-of-towner who actually got the ball rolling.

“That’s what was surprising, that this thing came to us,” said Rob Fendler, a board member on the Dan Patch Historical Society.

Kari Lundin grew up in Mankato as “a horse-crazy kid” involved in 4-H, and every time her family would go to Southdale Mall in Edina, she would beg her parents to drive through Savage.

“I would beg them every time as a horse-crazy kid, ‘Can we please go through Savage?’ Ninety-nine percent of the time they’d say, ‘No, we’re not going through Savage, it’s out of the way,’” explained Lundin. “All I wanted was to see ‘Home of Dan Patch’ on the water tower.”

When visiting the State Fair as a kid, Lundin said she would “look at the grandstand and think, ‘Oh my gosh, that’s where Dan Patch set the record!’”

Then last winter, Lundin learned of an estate sale where a trophy from 1903 was being sold — a trophy that had been won in an ice race for horses. Lundin got to the sale extra early before doors opened, so she started Googling on her phone to learn more about the trophy. She found an article about the ice race in question, and next to it was a story about Dan Patch arriving in Minneapolis after being purchased by Marion Savage.

That was enough to re-spark her interest in Dan Patch, who is widely believed to be the greatest Standardbred pacer in history, and is also the first athlete to endorse products.

Lundin — a Cannon Falls resident who breeds horses herself — then started reading a book about Dan Patch and came to a realization.

“In every breed and every discipline, there are great ones; they are great within their breed. They’re legends within their breed,” Lundin said, “but there are a handful every century — a small handful — that transcend that and capture a nation’s imagination. Dan Patch was one of those. His peer group is Secretariat, Man of War and Seabiscuit. That’s pretty lofty company.”

Lundin then called an old friend who works for the city of Savage and asked if there is any memorial in the city to Dan Patch. The friend replied that there is a mural on city hall and the Heritage Museum in the library, which is full of Dan Patch memorabilia, but that there is no statue.

Lundin decided that needed to change.

So Lundin called another old friend — Alexa King, a sculptor who recently did the statue of Barbaro at Churchill Downs in Kentucky and is “very well known in the horse business,” according to Lundin.

“I said, ‘Do you know Dan Patch?’ She said, ‘I grew up in Indiana [the horse’s original home], of course I know Dan Patch!’” laughed Lundin. “I said, ‘If I could find someplace to put it, would you be interested in doing it? Of course, we’re also going to have to find the money.’ She said ‘Most of the time I say no, but because it’s Dan Patch, I would love to.’”

Lundin reached out to Mayor Williams to gauge the city’s interest and received a positive response. Of course, they would also need approval from the Minnesota State Fair Foundation to place the sculpture on its fairgrounds. Thankfully, that was not a problem.

“I was surprised how warm and receptive they were,” said Lundin.

In a letter to Lundin, Minnesota State Fair Foundation Executive Director Kay Cady wrote that “At this point in our discussions, I can report that we have interest in exploring the idea of a Dan Patch sculpture,” calling it an “exciting project.”

## **FINANCING**

In order to start fundraising for the project, Lundin and her partners would need a 501 (c)3 organization to accept donations. They hooked up with Springboard for the Arts, which agreed to be the project’s fiscal sponsor.

“I’ve never done anything like this. I sold pies for 4-H, I sell houses,” laughed Lundin, a Realtor by trade. “This is all new to me, but Springboard has been wonderful in telling us how to go about it.”

Those donating to the project could receive recognition near the State Fair sculpture, listing them as “grand champions,” “reserve champions,” “champions” or “blue-ribbon sponsors,” depending on the contribution.

After the money is raised and sculptures finished, they would be donated to the Minnesota State Fair Foundation and the city of Savage, respectively.

While fundraising is still in the early stages as organizers work out the technical details with Springboard, there already has been an outpouring of support from the horse community and beyond. The project has

already received commitments from Canterbury Park, the Minnesota Thoroughbred Association, the Harness Racing Museum and Hall of Fame, and others. They have also received numerous letters of support.

“The Minnesota Horse Council, we presented to them before Savage and the State Fair, and they voted unanimously immediately after our presentation to support us,” said Lundin. “We were leaving, and one of the board members followed us out, almost to the parking lot and said ‘I want to get you started’ and wrote us a check for \$2,000.”

There could also be a crowdfunding aspect to the fundraising, wherein everyday citizens could contribute to the project, possibly through a website like [giveMN.org](http://giveMN.org).

A presentation was also given to the Dan Patch Historical Society at the Savage Library on July 22, and board member Rob Fendler was pleased with what he saw.

“This thing is already incredibly far along. We were really excited to see it happening,” said Fendler. “We couldn’t believe it.”

Fendler said organizers did not ask the Dan Patch Historical Society for any money, only for their support. The DPHS voted unanimously to support the project.

## **SCULPTURE PLANS**

The proposed sculpture for the State Fair would be near the new transportation hub on the west side of the fairgrounds, where 60 percent of last year’s 1.8 million visitors arrived. Lundin said that when Dan Patch raced, that’s where the paddock was located.

“It’s basically in the shadow of the grandstand,” explained Lundin, “right on Dan Patch Avenue.” Like the Barbaro statue at Churchill Downs (which Lundin called an “engineering marvel”), all four feet of the horse will be off the ground. The sculpture will be bronze, and there will be a water component.

“The one at the State Fair will be him with a sulky going over a track,” said Lundin, “and the track will have water flowing over it... to create the impression that the horse is moving. He’ll be pointing towards the finish line, where the finish line was in the grandstand.”

Dan Patch will also be bigger than Barbaro — at least his sculpture will. While the Barbaro sculpture is 1.25 times as big as the horse it’s inspired by, the Dan Patch sculpture will be 1.5 times bigger than the actual Dan Patch.

The sculpture outside the library in Savage will smaller, and will feature both Dan Patch and Marion W. Savage. The sculpture will explain Mr. Savage’s achievements and how the city came to be named after him.

“The State Fair one we hope will drive traffic to the library [and its Heritage Museum],” said Lundin. “[Savage] is where Dan Patch is buried; it’s his final home... It’s really important to honor that.” The library sculpture will hopefully act as a “teaching tool,” Fendler said, but it will also “show the respect the horse and Mr. Savage deserve for what they accomplished in their time, which was incredible. The more people learn about it, the better.”

Somewhere along the process, organizers would like to get both families that owned Dan Patch — the Messners of Indiana and the Savages — involved in some way. Lundin is meeting with the Messner family,

taking a detour during a vacation to see them in Indiana, and has reached out through Mayor Williams to the Savage family.

“We want both families involved,” said Lundin.

## **IMPACT**

So far, the project has been a unifying force of sorts.

“Everyone involved in this project is a horseman, [but] none of us have the same breed of horse. It’s very bizarre. Often times, you see the horse industry as quite fragmented, and lots of infighting between the breeds,” explained Lundin. “But Dan Patch transcends all of that. He’s important to all of us.”

For Fendler and the Dan Patch Historical Society, the project represents a much needed recognition of Dan Patch and his famous owner, and their contributions to Minnesota history.

“In my opinion, it’s long overdue,” said Fendler. “The whole [Dan Patch Historical Society] is thankful and appreciative of their efforts, and we’re on board to support them in any way we can.”

But for Lundin, the impact goes even deeper. For her, Dan Patch represents inspiration and hope.

“I get kind of weepy when I talk about this,” Lundin said. “If that statue does for some 6-year-old girl what those words on the Savage water tower did for me, her life will be better. She will meet people she never would have met, she’ll see things she never would have seen, try things she never would have tried, learn responsibility. If a kid looks up and goes ‘Wow, I want one like that’ or ‘I want that experience’ or even ‘I’m going to go to the library and learn about this,’ that’s a really good way for me to thank Dan Patch.”