



Quad-City Labyrinth Project



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Winding toward serenity

By Barb Arland-Fye/ QUAD-CITY TIMES | Wednesday, January 09, 2002

Walking a winding, circuitous path is leading some Quad-Citians to peace of mind. So much so that two women have launched the Quad-City Labyrinth Project.

Tonight, Pat McLaughlin, Ph.D., and Cindy Guinn are hosting an informational meeting about the project from 6 to 7:30 p.m. at the Southeast Branch of the Moline Public Library, 3130 41st St.

Afterward, they will teach their guests how to make a labyrinth in less than 10 minutes. Then they will walk it.

That is the impetus for a fund-raising drive to purchase a portable canvas labyrinth to share with the public. Used as a form of meditation for hundreds of years, the labyrinth has resurfaced in popularity since the 1980s.

It is a pattern with a purpose, a single, circuitous path leading to a center. That makes it different from a maze, which has false corridors and dead ends.

During the Middle Ages, Christians used the labyrinth to make a symbolic pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The Crusades at that time made it dangerous to take the actual trip, so certain cathedrals throughout Europe were designated as pilgrimage cathedrals. There, pilgrims walked in a labyrinth laid in the cathedral's stone floors.

A model of the labyrinth in the Chartres Cathedral outside Paris is growing in popularity through the efforts of Lauren Artress, the founder of the labyrinth organization, Veriditas, which was established at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco.

"It seems to me people are looking for a lot of different ways to pray because the old forms of prayer aren't working for them," said Sister Audrey Cleary of the Prayer & Spirituality Center in Davenport. The labyrinth "centers people. It grounds them."

Labyrinth patterns have been mowed or painted into the lawns outside St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Bettendorf, Faith Lutheran Church in Moline and across the street from First Presbyterian Church in East Moline.

The Rev. Mark Gehrke of Faith Lutheran Church said there are plans to convert its labyrinth from grass to stone. One church member has faithfully mowed a labyrinth design into the lawn the past two years, he added.

First Presbyterian's labyrinth "is a good worship project for the church community and the church," office secretary Deb Coffman said.

Quad-City Labyrinth Project organizers say there is interest in labyrinth walks year-round, especially since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks against the United States.

"We heard from our friends in San Francisco that people were flocking to the labyrinth for some consolation, trying to walk out their grief, their fear," McLaughlin said.

"We knew that we had to do something. We had to put our training to work for the community we



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love," she added.

Their labyrinth project consists of three parts: a community-supported nonprofit organization sponsoring free community walks at least twice a month; the Quad-City Chapter of the Labyrinth Society, which provides fellowship, slide presentations and other information about labyrinths; and a for-profit consulting business offering fee-based walks, retreats, workshops, staff development and consultations.

They hope to offer labyrinth walks in schools, nursing homes, community centers, prisons and other places.

As certified labyrinth facilitators, they are equipped to help people whose walks can evoke deep emotions, McLaughlin said.

"You can't just throw down a canvas and let people walk. People can go through profound experiences," she said.

Her own walking experiences have been cathartic. "I have gained so much personally from walking the labyrinth, feeling more centered, more peaceful, more healthy," she said.

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