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Commissioners OK tribute to Sojourner Truth

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Abolitionist and women's rights supporter Sojourner Truth spent a month in Steuben County, where she gave a speech in Angola in 1861.

[Wikipedia commons](#)

ANGOLA — Steuben County Commissioners gave approval to place a life-size bronze statue of abolitionist Sojourner Truth in the Steuben County Courtyard in their meeting Monday.

Karen DeForest, speaking on behalf of the Downtown Angola Coalition, said the group wanted to pursue a Preserving Women's Legacy Grant that would fund the commission and placement of the statue. The group has identified sculptor James Haire, a native of Crawfordsville, as the sculptor of choice.

The Downtown Angola Coalition is able to pursue the grant because it is an Indiana Main Street organization, one of the qualifiers for the grants that are to commemorate 100th anniversary of women's suffrage.

On Wednesday the group's board decided to pursue the grant to site the statue at the courthouse, pending commissioners' approval. The Courtyard already features a bust of Baron von Steuben, the Prussian general and Revolutionary War leader for whom the county is named.

"It could sit opposite von Steuben. It would be quite an attraction," said Commissioner Jim Crowl.

"If we can improve ourselves as a tourist attraction," said Ron Smith, president of the commissioners, "I'm all for it."

Because Sojourner Truth, a well-known freed slave who spoke out against slavery and in favor of women's rights, had spoken in Angola, on the Courthouse front porch in June 1861, it was determined to try to have a memorial placed in her honor, said Colleen McNabb-Everage, president of the Downtown Coalition.

Truth holds a storied place in the abolitionist movement and her time in Indiana was centered around the one speech presented in Angola and another presentation in Kosciusko County that featured an angry mob, based on newspaper accounts. Indiana was not a slave state but had strict laws against blacks' presence in the state. An account on the state website said freed slaves were not allowed in the state.

Truth's speech in Angola was controversial, and while many did not want her to speak, those in favor won the day. Security was provided by the Scott (Township) Home Guard. She is said to have spent about a month in Indiana promoting the Civil War and the abolitionist movement.

The cost of the bronze statue is estimated at about \$35,000. It will be life-sized. Truth was said to have stood about 6-feet tall.

The grants are available to between four to seven communities ranging from \$15,000 to \$40,000. The grants are being presented by Indiana Humanities and the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs.

Funds can be used to support historic preservation work, placemaking, public art, trail signage and other tangible projects that commemorate Indiana women's history and promote visitation to Main Street communities.

The grants have to be matched dollar for dollar.



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