

New Signs Honoring Hiawatha Native Unveiled

(KNZA)--Signs honoring the city of Hiawatha as the birthplace of basketball legend and civil rights pioneer John McLendon Jr. were unveiled during a dedication ceremony Tuesday evening.

The two signs are located near the Hiawatha National Bank on South 1st Street. Another sign will be erected at the west entrance to Hiawatha. The signs include a picture of the city clock tower building with McLendon in the background, his autograph and several of his major accomplishments.

Among those on hand for the dedication ceremony were Milton Katz, author of a biography on McLendon called "Breaking Away", K-U Athletic Director Sheahon Zenger and several members of McLendon's family.

Katz said McLendon was more than a highly successful basketball coach, breaking down racial barriers along the way.

Zenger called McLendon one of the true legend's in American society.

It was two years ago that the Hiawatha City Commission gave approval to the project spearheaded by a group of Hiawatha 8th grade middle school student lead by social science teacher Tim Abeita, agreeing to pay the more than 27-hundred dollar cost for the three signs.

The students obtained several letters of support for the project--including from K-U head basketball coach Bill Self and former K-U basketball standout Danny Manning.

Brown County Attorney Kevin Hill, who also played a key role in making the project a reality, called the signs honoring McLendon a long overdue recognition. He said he didn't realize the basketball legend was born in Hiawatha until stumbling upon Katz' book.

McLendon died in October 1999 at the age of 84.

Many Signals Communications