



BILLINGS GAZETTE

Big Timber chosen as site for Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame

19 HOURS AGO • [BY DENNIS GAUB FOR THE GAZETTE](#)

With a bid highlighting its location and a community leader's long-expressed desire to honor the state's cowboy heritage, Big Timber was chosen Monday to be the home of the Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center.

The hall of fame's statewide board spent the weekend reviewing proposals from Big Sky, Big Timber, Livingston and Madison County, where the town of Twin Bridges took the lead role.

When the board announced finalists for the site in November, Miles City and Wolf Point also were on the short list. Officials in those communities, however, later decided to withdraw their bids.

"It's a very exciting time for Sweet Grass County and Big Timber," said Susie Mosness, chair of the Sweet Grass County Commission.

The hall of fame and heritage center, a \$25 million to \$30 million project, will be constructed on a 30-acre site on Big Timber's west end near the Interstate 90 interchange. The price tag includes an endowment with funds to be raised over the next 30 to 50 years.

"We look forward to this coming to fruition and having a world-class campus coming here," Mosness said.

A "delighted" fellow commissioner, Rick Reed, complimented community members for their efforts in responding to the opportunity.

Reed said commissioners and county planners, led by Page Dringman, "worked on this very diligently for the last eight months. It's an example of what the people of Sweet Grass County and Big Timber have to offer to the project."

A news release from the board credited former state Sen. Leo Cremer of Sweet Grass County with the idea for a cowboy hall of fame. He proposed the facility more than 60 years ago, the release said.

"As we concluded our process, the important factors of sustainability, working with Montana's tourism infrastructure, and the overall cost for development of the project played an important role in Big Timber's selection," said DuWayne Wilson, president of the hall of fame group.

Noting that the Stetson building, which will be incorporated into the project, is highly visible from I-90, Wilson said all necessary infrastructure has been developed at the site. The building gives the project an open shell into which exhibits can be incorporated, he said.

"In all, this unique package has been offered at an extraordinary cost savings over what it would otherwise cost to implement at any other site," Wilson said.

He said the contract terms for two landowners involved in Big Timber's bid gave the hall of fame board more flexibility than those offered by landowners at other sites.

Wilson said Big Sky, Livingston and Twin Bridges submitted "fantastic" proposals.

"Every finalist had some quality that ranked higher than their peers," he said, and that required the board to make the best business decision possible to choose the site.

Mike Gurnett, another board member, said Big Timber's location allows him to "envision the parking lot

filled with school buses from across the state as students explore Montana's western heritage.”

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