



U.S. Rep. John Lewis' Lifetime Commitment to Civil Rights Honored with Public Sculpture, 'The Bridge' in Atlanta

Civil Rights Legend and U.S. Representative John Lewis is honored for his lifetime work in protecting civil and human rights. "The Bridge" sculpture is unveiled in one of the nation's largest public parks

Atlanta ([PRWEB](#)) September 10, 2005 -- The Freedom Park Conservancy in Atlanta honored civil rights legend and U.S Representative John Lewis (D-GA) with the unveiling and dedication of "The Bridge," a public art sculpture that symbolizes his lifetime work in civil, human and neighborhood rights.

"The Bridge" is the first permanent public art sculpture in Freedom Park and the most significant gift the city of Atlanta has received since the 1996 Olympic Games. It is located on the newly created John Lewis Plaza at the Ponce de Leon entrance of Freedom Park near midtown Atlanta.

"Congressman Lewis has done so much for us as a city and a nation," said Al Caproni, chairman of the John Lewis Plaza Committee, a board member and former president of Freedom Park Conservancy. "We want this sculpture to be a destination for residents and visitors from around the world to view and better understand the life contributions made by Congressman Lewis."

Participating in today's tribute were former U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young; United States Congressman David Scott; Chief Justice Leah Ward Sears; Honorable Mayor Shirley Franklin; Georgia Department of Transportation Commissioner Harold Linnenkohl; Rabbi Alvin Sugarman; Freedom Park Conservancy President Kara Land; and Al Caproni.

"This sculpture will become one of Atlanta's historic treasures, and I am thrilled for the city to have this gift to share with our citizens and visitors," said Mayor Franklin. "It symbolizes each monumental step that John has made in his devotion to humankind."

"The Bridge" is an added link to Freedom Park's connection of its other human rights anchors, The Carter Presidential Library and the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, to the surrounding diverse neighborhoods.

Each piece of the sculpture marks a poignant moment in the congressman's life from his rural past in Alabama; his civil rights journey that includes his courageous march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma,

Alabama 40 years ago; his days as an Atlanta City Council member; to his current role as U.S. Representative for Georgia and a leading voice for human rights for all Americans.

The 42-feet by 11.5-feet metal structure is the largest piece of public art ever created by renowned folk artist Thornton Dial, an Alabama native. Mr. Dial is widely recognized as one of today's most important American self-taught artists. His large-scale paintings and constructions often depict the political, social and economic struggles of African Americans in the South.

Rep. Lewis selected Dial to create the work after learning in 1996 that the Freedom Park Conservancy wanted to commission an artist to pay tribute to him. Freedom Park Conservancy members wanted to honor Lewis for



his well-known civil rights work and for his leadership in their neighborhoods' historic battle to stop a superhighway.

'I'm humbled and honored by this wonderful work of art, 'The Bridge,' being placed in this historic section of Atlanta. Over the years I have only tried to play a small role in making life better for all people,' said Rep. Lewis. 'It is my hope and prayer that this work will inspire others to build bridges of understanding.'

As an Atlanta City Councilman in the early 1980s, Lewis helped to block the creation of a superhighway that would have divided many intown Atlanta neighborhoods that surround Freedom Park today. After a decade long dispute, then-Mayor Maynard Jackson joined with then-State Senator David Scott and other elected officials to finally resolve the issue. As a result of a mediated settlement between the neighborhoods, Georgia DOT and the City of Atlanta, the neighborhoods were reconnected by green space and Freedom Park, the largest urban park created in the United States in the 20th century, was made possible.

'The Bridge' has been 10 years in the making and has received more than \$400,000 of support from AGL Resources, Inc.; The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation; The Coca-Cola Company; Georgia Department of Transportation; Greenberg Traurig, LLP; Kilpatrick Stockton, LLP; McKenna Long & Aldridge, LLP; IBEW; The Sembler Company; and private and individual donors. The project included making improvements to the surrounding 10 acres of Freedom Park, creating Lewis Plaza, acquiring and installing the sculpture and establishing an endowment for its maintenance.

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The Freedom Park Conservancy is a volunteer organization whose mission is to promote the improvement and preservation of Freedom Park for the benefit of a diverse public. Members on the board include Citywide directors and representatives of neighborhoods and institutions bordering Freedom Park, including Inman Park Neighborhood Association, Candler Park Neighborhood Organization, Druid Hills Civic Association, Lake Claire Neighbors, Ponce Corridor East Association, Poncey Highland Neighborhood Association, Virginia Highland Civic Association, and The Carter Center, Inc. The Conservancy also coordinates its efforts with the National Park Service's MLK, Jr. National Historic Site.

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