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Eden Prairie residents share memories of Prince

By Karla Wennerstrom editor@edenprairienews.com Apr 28, 2016



Steve Lucas photographed the mural painted on Graffiti Bridge in honor of the movie, "Graffiti Bridge." Photo courtesy of Steve Lucas Photography

Twenty-five years ago, in 1991, Eden Prairie lost its iconic Graffiti Bridge, torn down to make room for an expanded Valley View Road. To mark the occasion, the community gathered and painted the bridge one last time.

Prince named the 1990 movie "Graffiti Bridge" after the landmark. It is just one of many connections the community had to Prince, who died April 21 at age 57.

Last week, Eden Prairie residents were among those around the globe remembering the icon at his Paisley Park studio and beyond. The Eden Prairie Police Department has been assisting the city of Chanhassen and Carver County Sheriff's Office by providing equipment and traffic control around Paisley Park.

"I grew up in Eden Prairie so Prince was always a topic of conversation," said Cindy Porter.

Tori Hill of Eden Prairie agreed, saying she and her husband, Leon, went to visit Paisley Park and to the memorial at First Avenue last week.

Hill said attending a concert at Paisley Park had been "electrifying." She said Prince's support of new artists was incredible, as are his charitable initiatives, which are now coming to light. "We will miss him."

The Eden Prairie Historical Society noted that Prince was part of Eden Prairie history, with his first recording studio near Hennepin Technical College across Flying Cloud Drive, and a townhouse in the city.

"One of the most visible reminders of the impact of his music was demonstrated with a painting on Graffiti Bridge on Valley View Road," the Historical Society posted on Facebook.

Prince's likeness and Prince-related art appeared on the ever-changing bridge a few times.

At least one of those times was captured by Steve Lucas of Steve Lucas Photography. He said the mural of Prince was completed shortly before the bridge was torn down.

"I ran over the next morning and shot it right away," he said. "You'd put something up one day and come back the next day and someone would have painted over it."

Lucas said that people would celebrate birthdays, graduations, invite prom dates and pose for photos near Graffiti Bridge.

The photos Lucas posted on Facebook Thursday had reached almost 150,000 people by Tuesday.

Michelle Fourre and her son, Joshua, decorated the LRT Trail pedestrian bridge where Graffiti Bridge stood on Friday after Prince's death.

The longtime Eden Prairie resident said she's just a Prince fan from back in 1980 when she first heard his music on KMOJ.

She said they spent about two hours on the decorations. Joshua made the Prince symbols while she strung the loops.

"We used 510 feet of mesh fabric," she said. "A passerby stopped and brought us balloons to also hang.

"I went back on Saturday and hung up a sheet of paper with a short history of the bridge, also explaining that Prince named his album after it."

Monuments around the world turned purple, and Eden Prairie's Green Acres Event Center was one of the first locally to take on a purple hue.

Owner Steve Schussler, creator of the Rainforest Cafe restaurants, said that his first experience with Prince was when the star visited Schussler's club, Jukebox Saturday Night, in downtown Minneapolis.

"He came in a stretch limo and he came with all kinds of security and bodyguards because he wanted to check out the new club in town," Schussler said.

"You couldn't get within 10 feet of him because his security guards were about five feet wide," he said.

Schussler said he had run into Prince several times over the years, and had been lucky to be invited backstage.

"He was always a very mysterious gentleman," Schussler said.

Sunhi Ryan, who runs the event center, thought it would be an amazing gesture to light the building purple.

Although the building can display different colors for events like weddings and parties, they have never lit it up in memory of someone before.

"This is a first," Schussler said.

"You're not so much celebrating the death as you are the life," Schussler said. "It's the same thing with painting everything purple. We're not mourning him, we're celebrating him. That's, I think, where Minnesota stands out among the world. We're not mourning, we're celebrating."

Melissa Waldenburg of Chanhassen said growing up with Prince and Paisley Park a few miles away felt a little like living by Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory – in the best possible way.

"Mysterious, eccentric, magnetic, creative genius, lover of purple jackets and outlandish clothes, randomly letting people see glimpses behind the gates," Waldenburg said. "Now that I'm grown up, I greatly regret never getting that 'golden ticket' inside. Now that I'm grown up, I especially love all the stories of his kindness and generosity along with the stories of his quirkiness."

"Thanks for the memories, Prince," the city of Eden Prairie posted online. "The music lives on forever."

Karla Wennerstrom

