

# Art for trails and greenways

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## Fairfield Loop Trail Bridge, Fairfield, Iowa

Artist and students turn trail bridge into a work of art.

### Artist: Judy Bales

Project completed in October 2004



This bridge project links the Walton Lake trail and Chautauqua Park. It creates another link in the Fairfield Loop Trail, which ultimately will be a 17-mile circuit around the town of Fairfield. The challenge was to make a chain link structure more attractive and to reflect some of the area's history.

According to project artist Judy Bales, "I collaborated with bridge engineers and fabricators to design the steel cage that supports the chain link enclosure for the bridge. I also coordinated with Fairfield High School art teacher Mark Shafer to involve his students in the creation of ceramic tiles for the interior of the bridge."

The design for the bridge's steel cage was inspired by several historic structures, particularly the timber framework of locally designed and manufactured Louden barns. The old wooden railroad trestles and bridges of a bygone era were also sources of inspiration. By elongating the angles and alternating their direction, artist Judy Bales created a pattern that gives rhythm and dynamism to the bridge, while being reminiscent of the old structures.

This theme continues in the ceramic tiles that enhance the bridge's concrete curb. They were designed and created by local high school art classes. They depict details of Louden barn blueprints and Louden Machinery parts catalogs. This bridge blends history and design in an elegant display of public art that is pleasing to the eye, functional, and educational.



Fairfield Loop Trail Bridge in Iowa



Ceramic tiles produced by high school students

new dimension to the trail system," he said.

Fairfield High School Students created over 150 tiles in sets of three (see detail photo). The material is terra cotta with a specific formula designed to resist damage from freezing and thawing temperatures.

The Jefferson County Trails Committee was responsible for the project. The JCTC received a \$5,000 "Challenge America" grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. JCTC Chairman Ron Blair expressed his satisfaction with the artistic bridge concept.

"The idea of public art as part of the trail system was a novel idea. To have a tie-in with local agricultural and manufacturing history and adding high school students' involvement was a fantastic development. It adds a richness and

The 246-foot bridge is needed to span the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad tracks at Chautauqua Park. When plans were being made, JCTC members discovered they were obliged to cover the bridge completely with chain link to keep people from throwing things onto the tracks below. Hoping to improve the visual aspects of the pridge, they looked into ways to enhance the structure with artistic concepts.

Local artist Judy Bales was chosen because of her experience with a large public art bridge project in Arizona. She enlisted Fairfield High School art teacher Mark Shafer and his students for inspiration and help on the project.



**The Bridge serves as an important connector in the trail system by spanning this rail line**



**The bridge in winter  
August 5, 2005**

"Students were able to experience the process professionals undertake in developing a public art installation," Shafer explained. "They will be held accountable to real-life standards of artistic excellence. Their creations will be permanent," he said."

"Sports get so much attention and funding. Artists are responsible to get art out into the public eye," said Bales, citing student participation. "Part of our grant proposal was that we would involve both the community and local history."

The bridge was opened to the public in a ribbon-cutting ceremony held October 2, 2004.