

What is happening here?

You are standing near the site of a new sculpture for a newly envisioned space in Riverside North. This area of the La Crosse River Marsh is an urban wetland that is home to wildlife, native and invasive plant species. Some invasive species are being harvested to become the inaugural sculpture, “The Arch of Nature,” in a space that may soon become home to more sculptural installations, sponsored by the City of La Crosse Arts Board.

“The Arch of Nature” is inspired by the Losey Memorial Arch at the entrance to Oak Grove Cemetery, which is based on the triumphal arch of antiquity. “Triumphal,” is defined as celebrating a triumph, or showing a feeling of triumph. “The Arch of Nature” celebrates no military victory or singular, monumental achievement. And unlike the permanence of other triumphal gateway arches, “The Arch of Nature” celebrates the triumph of nature’s ability to survive by changing. It acknowledges the ephemerality of our existence, serving as a gateway from our urban world into the wetland habitat, a passage between downtown and the new Riverside North development. As the word “triumphal” also embodies, “The Arch of Nature” is a monument to joy, mystery and whimsy, and a contemplation of what we as a culture value: what are our individual and collective triumphs? What is our relationship to nature in light of these? How do we discover joy in nature in this urban wetland, bordered by industrial, retail, housing, and recreational spaces? In ways, this space and this “monument” symbolize the playfulness and mystery we can find here, marking a passageway to a place where you can discover joy and whimsy on your way from place to place.