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South Shore wants to give landmark a home

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April 14--The Indian Head Rock pulled from the Ohio River in 2009 by Steve Shaffer, prompting an interstate feud over ownership of the artifact, may get a new home in South Shore if local history buffs have their way.

The rock was a well known landmark up through the mid part of the 20th century, when changes to the dams on the river lead to higher water levels that kept the rock submerged year round.

It was first donated to the city of Portsmouth by Shaffer and his friends, who had become fascinated by the old stories and dove in the river until they located it, but the state of Kentucky claimed ownership as it was found closer to their shore.

After first being stored in a Portsmouth city garage bay, it was moved to Greenup, where it has been held in storage ever since.

A group in South Shore, however, is looking at obtaining grant funding to build an appropriate display for the rock. Dwight Cropper, with the Kentucky Native American Heritage Commission, held a public meeting with Greenup County Judge Executive Robert Carpenter and representatives of FIVCO to discuss the issue, including the involvement of FIVCO and the Kentucky Heritage Council in obtaining grant funds and planning an appropriate display.

"We don't want the joke to continue," Cropper said, noting some of the flippant attitudes to emerge following the feud over the rock. "We have to do this right."

Cropper explained that whatever plans they come up with for the rock, the decisions ultimately rest with the Commonwealth.

"It's the property of the Commonwealth (of Kentucky)," Cropper said, "So Dr. (George) Crothers, the state archaeologist, has final say."

Carpenter said he was eager to have the guidance of the state archaeologists to guarantee they properly transport and display the large sandstone boulder.

Carpenter said that now that it has been out of the river, and in storage for so long, he worried that "even with our best efforts, we put those forks under it, it may just crumble."

The experts assistance with guaranteeing that doesn't occur, he explained, would be appreciated.

Kelly Ward, with the multi-county organization FIVCO that is helping with the grant writing, said that realistically they'd like to have funding within a year, but it depends on the grants available. They are seeking around \$7,500, he explained, from the Department of Local Government through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which would be about half of the expected costs for building and outfitting the display.