

The Trolls

By the late 1800s more than 75% of the Mount Horeb community was Norwegian. Trolls originated from early Scandinavian folklore. They are usually smaller beings, similar in size to dwarves or elves. Trolls tend to dwell in mounds or near the sea—in our case "mounds" (nearby Blue Mounds)—and are known to have developed semi-magical powers such as prophecy and shape-shifting. According to ancient Norwegian legend, trolls have long, crooked noses; only four fingers and toes; and a long, bushy tail. Trolls live to be hundreds of years old.

Most trolls are shaggy and look a bit frightening, but are mostly good-natured and naive. It is advised to maintain a good relationship with trolls as they are often known to be guarding treasures of gold or gemstones. In our case, they guard the friendly people and wonderful attractions of our community!

In the mid 1970s Open House Imports, a Scandinavian gift shop started placing trolls imported from Norway on their lawn to entice visitors into their shop. The trolls caught not only visitors' attention, but also that of passing truckers. In the late 1970s truckers would denote their location to trucker buddies on CB radio by saying, "I just passed your mother-in-law on Highway 18/151," referring to the trolls they had just passed.

In the mid 1980s, an 18/151 bypass around Mount Horeb was built. Village businesses were very concerned about the negative economic impact the bypass might cause. Memories of the troll spotting truckers sparked an idea, and the Troll theme emerged.

Resident woodcarver, Michael Feeney, AKA, the Troll Carver of Mount Horeb, was asked to create carved trolls by Village officials who were impressed with his work and soon more trolls had a life and a home! As more trolls were erected on Business 18/151 it became known as the "Trollway." The slogan, "Take the Trollway through Mount Horeb" was developed for highway signage and other marketing campaigns.

The Chicken Thief, one of Mike's first trolls, was placed on Main Street (downtown Hwy. 18/151) next to Olson's Christmas House (now housed inside the Mount Horeb Area Museum), and *The Accordion Player* can be found near Mount Horeb Telephone Company. A fun fact—*The Accordion Player* once captured the attention of a busload of Norwegian accordian players. According to Mike, the bus unloaded, the passengers disembarked with their accordions and, much to the delight of onlookers, proceeded to serenade the troll for at least 20 minutes!

Our carved trolls are known to relax outside, watering flowers, tending chickens, playing music or just plain ol' hamming it up for your viewing pleasure! Over the years Mike has created over 20 life-sized whimsical trolls along our historic Main Street. Check out his work at www.woodenchicken.com. Now, new trolls by other area carvers are helping to populate the Trollway for visitors to enjoy. Mount Horeb also has its very own living troll, Jorgen, who can be found at many festivals throughout the year!



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