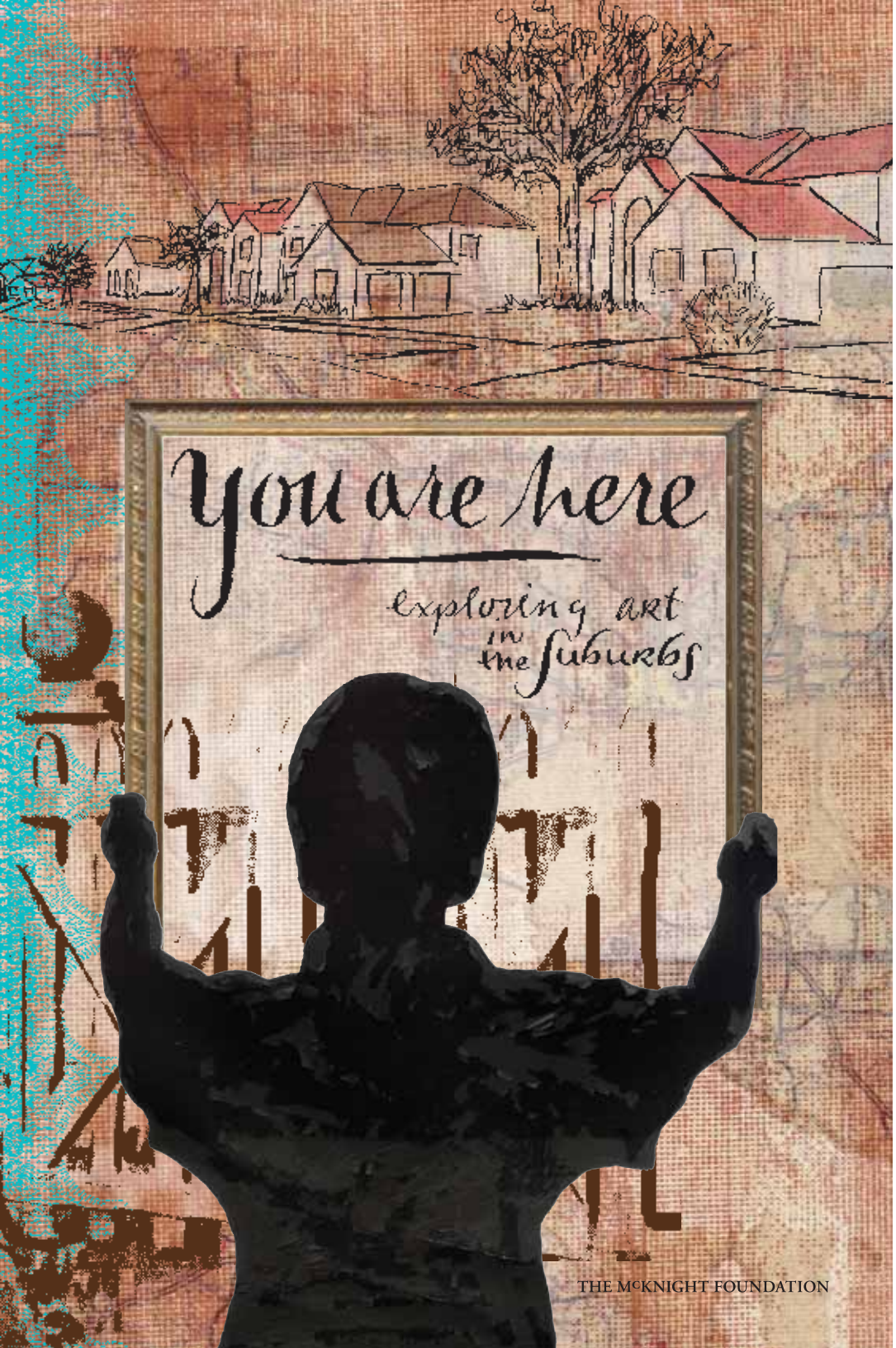
You are here
exploring art in the suburbs
THE McKNIGHT FOUNDATION

You are here

exploring art in the suburbs

Produced by
The McKnight Foundation
www.mcknight.org
and
FORECAST Public Artworks
www.forecastart.org

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This sourcebook and map are intended to be springboards for your own suburban public arts adventure; neither is in any way comprehensive. To be eligible for inclusion in this map, destinations had to be places where visitors can readily see artworks or attend regular events and performances. To tell us about your own must-see or must-do suburban arts recommendations, go to www.mcknight.org/youarehere.

Foreword

by Kip Kapion, President, The McKnight Foundation

Greetings. *You Are Here* is this foundation's second book about the development of the arts in Twin Cities suburbs. The first book, *A New Angle: Arts Development in the Suburbs*, was meant to spur local dialogue about the emerging trend of suburban cultural development. It achieved that, and much more.

We received a huge wave of interest from *A New Angle*—locally, regionally, and from across the country. The response was mostly positive and productive: the book has been a starting point for countless community discussions and plans from Florida to Washington State. In Minnesota, it has stimulated new art activity and partnerships, all the while making the arts more accessible and integrated into our region's daily life.

So why publish a second book, especially less than three years after *A New Angle*? As Carolyn Bye, executive director of the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council and the author of *A New Angle*, acknowledges in her *You Are Here* commentary, there have been no "monumental changes" since the first report "but, rather, many small steps … ."

Those small steps are taking us further on a remarkable journey. The discussion sparked by *A New Angle* is reflected in the decisions and actions of patrons, funders, performers, organizations, and communities throughout the metro region. Consider:

- Despite the enormous financial pressures facing Minnesota communities in recent years, the commitment to the arts in many suburbs has never been stronger. Caponi Art Park, in the rapidly growing community of Eagan, struggled to gain traction for years. But in 2002, Dakota County residents approved a tax increase to acquire and preserve open space. Now, with citizens' renewed commitment to arts and open space, Caponi Art Park will be preserved for future generations to enjoy.

- The Excelsior and Grand/Park Commons East project in St. Louis Park is just one example of public art being integrated into community projects. The redevelopment of the first-ring Minneapolis suburb's main street includes significant displays of public art. Notably, this commitment was finalized in December 2003—again, at a time when communities and developments faced tremendous financial pressure to justify expenditures.

Both of these stories are profiled in *You Are Here*. But there are many more decisions made every day as an outgrowth of the conversations started by *A New Angle*. North Star Opera, Thursday Musicale, The Loft Literary Center, and many other organizations are for the first time scheduling performances and classes in suburban venues. Partnerships are being created with suburban arts centers and school districts. The MacPhail Center for Music, a long-time downtown Minneapolis institution, is building a new facility downtown while it expands programming via access sites around the Twin Cities.

These stories help explain the purpose of this second publication about the suburban arts scene. There was (and still is, to be frank) a belief among some that for a foundation to talk about cultural development outside the core cities is a kind of betrayal, and the beginning of the end for both culture and great cities.

We believe, along with an ever-growing number of people, that in order for Minnesota to thrive, we need all sectors of the state—public, private, for-profit, nonprofit, urban, rural, and suburban—to embrace a vision of community in which cultural life plays a pivotal role. Fostering cultural activity at a local level does not come at the expense of other communities. Instead, it builds regional and state audiences, promotes new and diversified forms of economic activity, and expands a shared appreciation of and support for a robust cultural life. The unique circumstances that confront one town or region are always connected to what's going on down the road or in the next county. We are all the richer for looking beyond the issues that divide us toward the opportunities that can be gained by working together.

By talking about arts development in the suburbs, local leaders have better appreciated and supported efforts in their communities, and suburban and urban artists have connected with new colleagues and audiences—making the arts more accessible for everyone and the regional arts ecology more efficient and effective. We know there is more to come, and this small book is our contribution to keeping the conversations spirited. *You Are Here* isn't as much a second report as it is the second chapter in a continuing discussion.

You Are Here has three parts: reflections by *A New Angle* author Bye on what has happened in suburban cultural development since the publication of that book in 2002; a map with a representative sample of the many incredible art places and happenings in the suburbs; and a series of profiles that look deeper into how some of these places came into being. This book asserts that although the region needs large institutions to set standards and act as cultural anchors, people also want arts experiences that are close to home, that are part of their daily lives. As our region continues to grow, more communities will take steps to build and show off their unique identities and amenities. We believe this will only make our entire region stronger.

I hope this volume will be useful to your own exploration of how the arts can make any community a better, more interesting place to live. And, as always, I welcome your thoughts.

Notes

by Jack Becker, Executive Director, FORECAST Public Artworks

This survey of arts in the seven-county metropolitan area—and to some extent the regions just beyond the seven counties—proves that the urban core is no longer the only place to experience the arts. In fact, urbanites are beginning to realize that they may have to travel outside the urban core to experience the full benefits of the metro arts community.

Cultural development is one indicator of suburban evolution, the maturing of communities that once consisted of roads, strip malls, big school buildings, and cul-de-sacs with cookie-cutter homes. Gaining ground now are town centers, gathering places, signature landmarks, and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods.

Suburban residents young and old want a sense of character and identity for their communities. The process of getting there, though, is a gradual one, and art is one way to prime the pump. As a public art consultant here for more than a decade, I've seen an increased interest in the arts among suburban city managers, developers, county commissioners, library directors, and school district superintendents. Many are seeking help in their efforts to plan, find artists, raise funds, and organize citizens.

Seeing this growth from the ground gave rise to my desire for another perspective—a bigger picture of the arts landscape beyond the boundaries of Minneapolis and St. Paul. What was needed was an arts map of the region, coupled with a collection of essays examining particular projects and how they came about.

Neal Cuthbert, the arts program director at The McKnight Foundation whose interest in suburban cultural development led to McKnight's publication of *A New Angle: Arts Development in the Suburbs* in 2002, was quick to respond to the idea. Beyond its generous support for this new study, McKnight offered to publish the map and collection of essays.

This guide is intended to inform, illuminate, and encourage the exploration of all seven counties—and beyond. The essays and map present stories and case studies about different venues, artistic expressions, geographic locales, and trends in suburban taste. For, if variety is the spice of life, the taste buds of the suburbs are tingling. Here's to whetting the appetite for cultural growth regionwide.

Jack Becker is executive director of FORECAST Public Artworks. FORECAST, the co-sponsor of *You Are Here*, is a St. Paul–based nonprofit organization offering facilitation services, grants to Minnesota artists, and a national journal called *Public Art Review*.

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a WIDER Angle

by Carolyn Bye

The 2002 report, *A New Angle: Arts Development in the Suburbs*, was intended as a wake-up call for Minnesota artists and policymakers. To artists I wanted to say: "There are *audiences* in the *suburbs*. Why continue to focus all your audience development resources and energy on the same frequently saturated markets that most other Minneapolis/St. Paul organizations are targeting when there are audiences to be mined—if only you will dispense with your outdated beliefs about how to deliver programming?"

I had also hoped that *A New Angle* would change the way funders, particularly public funders, considered requests from suburban arts organizations. However, with the market crash, there wasn't a lot of traction for arts groups that wanted to develop new suburban audiences, or with funders interested in working with them.

In the two-and-a-half years since the report's publication, there have been no monumental changes but, rather, many small steps, and I am hopeful as I hear much "discourse in the commons." The range of dialogue has been fascinating:

- Many arts organizations in the greater metropolitan area have said they felt "legitimized" or "validated" when their stories, dreams, accomplishments, and struggles reached a public forum.

- Responses from urban arts organizations have been as varied as the organizations themselves. Some clutched their organizational pocketbook—"Oh, no! Now McKnight is going to reallocate part of its already diminishing arts funding pool to yet another group of organizations" (which didn't happen). Others made some genuine attempts to capture a larger share of suburban audiences through changes in marketing, partnerships, and venues. There was even the occasional epiphany (see page 13, The conversion of Jack Becker).

- More suburban lawmakers have come to understand the great appreciation for the arts in their districts, and some have an increased awareness that arts support is a good investment. Suburban arts activists continue to shore up the support of target legislators.

- Language has changed around the Minnesota State Arts Board's table, and the board's 2005 strategic plan has devoted more "ink" to the recognition of suburban audiences than it has in the past.

Bricks, mortar, and blueprints for change

Since the publication of *A New Angle*, we've seen some interesting new buildings, infrastructure planning, and suburban public arts projects, including the Bloomington Fine Arts Center, the City of Ramsey's comprehensive development plan that includes arts in its infrastructure, and St. Louis Park's street-design project. (Two of these projects are described in more detail on the following pages.) In spring 2004, Dakota County's economic development agency hosted a well-attended conference for its communities that focused on the arts and economic development.

Contrary to the stereotype that suburbs are only about new building construction, we've also seen the creative reuse of buildings, including:

- Orono Discovery Center, an empty elementary school transformed into a multiuse, multigenerational arts center with a dedicated teen art center;
- Mainstreet School of Performing Arts in Hopkins, once a parochial school, now a charter school; and
- The Depot Coffee House, a city-owned train depot converted into a teen-run coffeehouse/arts venue/gathering space in Hopkins.

What I haven't seen is an increasing share of public and foundation resources being directed toward greater-metro organizations; perhaps things will change when funding portfolios rebound. However, greater-metro communities and organizations are not waiting for grants from the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, The McKnight Foundation, the Minnesota State Arts Board, or other funding sources to help them move ahead with projects. They are figuring out how to get the work done now.

One unexpected outcome has been the interest in *A New Angle* outside Minnesota. College professors have called for copies to distribute as assigned reading to their arts management classes. Communities developing cultural plans have given everyone on their planning committees a copy to read and have asked me to make keynote presentations. And when I attend a national conference of grantors or arts folks, invariably someone will come up to me to say thanks for capturing what their regions or communities are grappling with as they attempt to serve all audiences and build unity.

The conversion of Jack Becker

My last—and best—example illustrates what's happening in our region and in metropolitan areas across the country. I call it "The conversion of Jack Becker." Jack, the executive director of FORECAST Public Artworks and the force behind

this publication, had heard about arts activities in suburbs, but he admitted that he had never stepped back to see what was really happening there until he read *A New Angle*. "I didn't know there was a reason why artists would work in a suburb," he says.

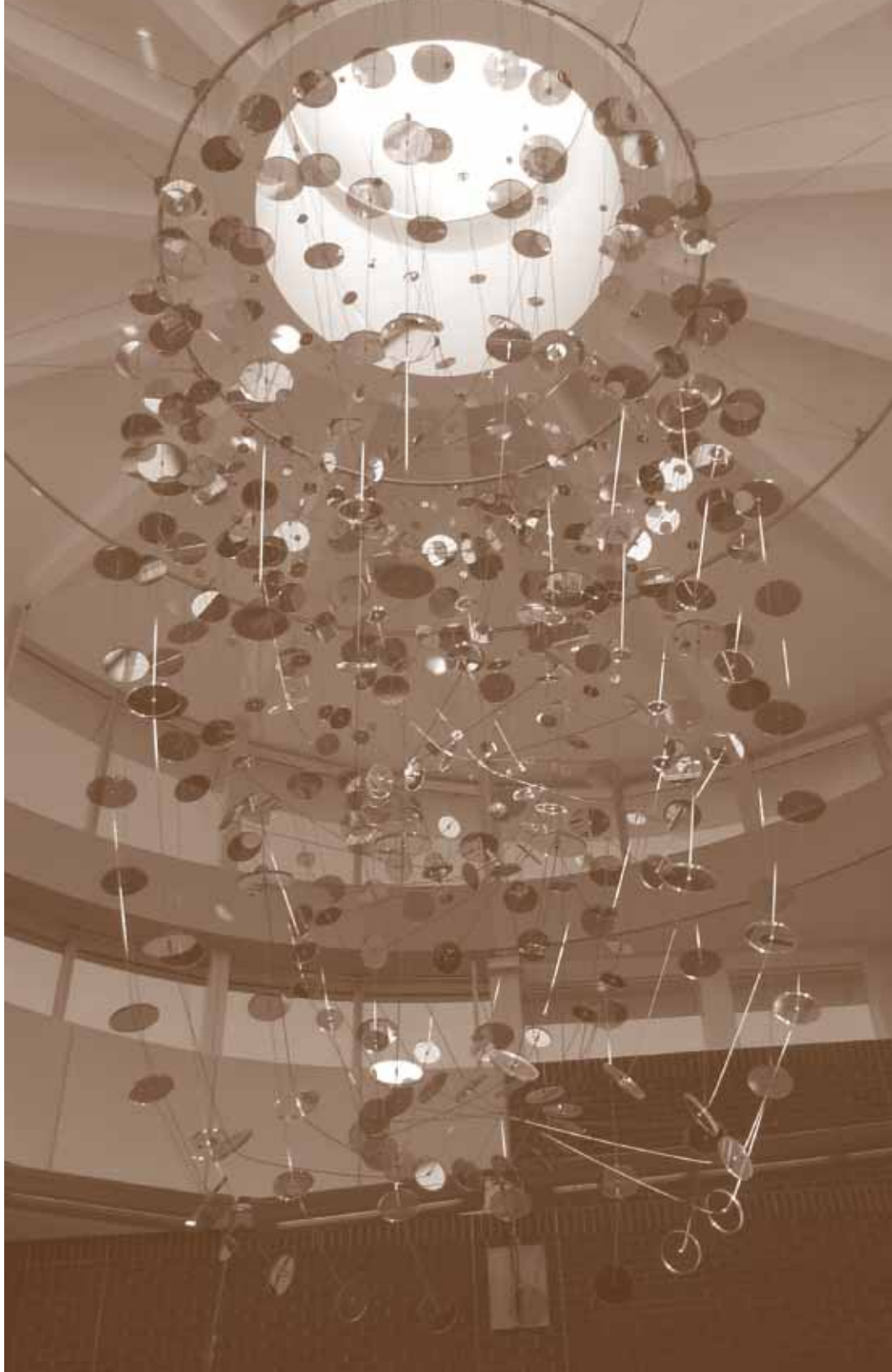
In the past few years Jack has worked to connect artists and suburban communities and, where work is in the planning stages, he's seeing art and artists being integrated from the start. "The potential impact for artists in a community-building process can be tremendous," Jack says. "If I likened it to a building, it would be about artists having the opportunity to get in on the design phase, helping to shape the vision rather than retrofitting [it]." At the same time, he still perceives subtle and not so subtle biases about the suburbs. Even yet, for some artists, working in the suburbs is considered "selling out," as if serving *those people* is anathema for any *serious* artist.

What about my viewpoint? Has my thinking changed? I continue to believe that suburban residents are underrepresented in the majority of audiences of the publicly funded arts organizations in Minneapolis/St. Paul, and that opportunities in many suburban communities are limited. That a generation of suburban youth is growing up without regular access to theater, dance, music, opera, and art galleries is heartbreaking and a shared failure of arts organizations and policymakers. Moreover, it's going to come back to haunt arts institutions when their audiences, donors, and volunteers dwindle as today's young people reach adulthood ("season-ticket buyer" age) without having experienced the arts as part of their lives.

In the September 7, 2004, edition of the *New York Times*, National Endowment for the Arts Chairman Dana Gioia said, "If I represent anything in American culture it's the necessity for the arts to have public engagement. I'm a populist elitist. Some art is better than other art, but without an audience, it's all diminished." As a funder working with public (taxpayer) money, I, too, have become more comfortable with my own populist views.

Gioia continued, "The current problem [of the arts] in this country is not with the supply of art but with the demand." I would amend this statement to say, *The current problem of the arts in this country is not with the supply of art but with the art makers' unwillingness to create and distribute art to all communities, including suburbs, where there are untapped audiences to be developed and served.*

Carolyn Bye has been executive director of the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council since 1993. She is also the author of *A New Angle: Arts Development in the Suburbs*, published by The McKnight Foundation in 2002.



"Northern Cascade," by Ray King, 2005,
glass and cable
photo by Michael McConnell

by Judy Woodward

North St. Paul and the World's Most famous SNOWman

Epiphanies—those brief, life-altering moments of revelation—are not the exclusive property of the spiritually advanced or the religiously devout. For every case of a holy man like the Apostle Paul, whose life was utterly transformed by the divine encounter on the Road to Damascus, there's a Lloyd Koesling.

Koesling, who died in 2002, was a barber and, later in life, the operator of a go-kart track and mini-golf park in North St. Paul. An upstanding citizen, a civic booster, and a strong family man, Koesling experienced his epiphany on a trip to Disneyland.

As Carol Koesling tells it, her husband was impressed by the towering man-made constructions at the Anaheim, California, theme park. From Tom Sawyer's Island to the Matterhorn, nothing was what it seemed to be. The genius of Disney was to improve upon the natural state. Whatever might burn or crumble—or melt—in real life was reconstructed in plastic, stucco, and concrete. The raw materials of the real world had been excluded altogether; what was left had been molded, welded, and painted until it was reborn a perfect imitation.

photo by Sue Hartley

Standing amid the looming synthetic creations, Koesling knew that here was an idea he could bring home to North St. Paul. And he knew just where his vision was needed most.


photo by Sue Hartley

Labor-saving and sun-defying: a community builds a mascot

Since the early 1950s, the local business organizations had sponsored an annual "Snow Frolic." The midwinter event combined a display of civic pride with old-fashioned fun. Its mascot was a mammoth snowman constructed by local volunteers. According to the centennial history of the city, *A Century of Good Living—North St. Paul* by Rosemary Palmer (North St. Paul Centennial Commission, 1987), the snowman was dubbed the official symbol of the community in 1964. Snow was trucked in from the surrounding area, and brawny civic boosters put in hours of labor, all in service of North St. Paul's aspiration to become known as the site of the World's Biggest Snowman.

Alas, the Minnesota climate being what it is, what goes up in January inevitably melts come spring. And the town's source of civic pride came with an annual renewal notice. Not only were the city fathers asking for substantial contributions of snow-packing muscle, but they were asking for it year after year.

And then Koesling stepped forward with his Disney-inspired vision: why not make the giant snowman a permanent symbol of the community?

It was 1971, and in North St. Paul, snowman construction had just entered the modern age. Koesling drew up plans for a stucco-and-steel snowman that would withstand the ravages of winter—and summer. The City Council donated land at the corner of Seventh and Margaret streets to give the snowman a place to stand downtown. Junior Chamber of Commerce members raised $2,000 to cover supplies. Volunteers came forward to construct the sculpture. A firm of consulting engineers, Johnson-Sahlman, Inc., analyzed the plans and proposed modifications

to stiffen the snowman's spine. Thin, barely legible wax-paper copies of the engineers' plans can still be found among Carol Koesling's souvenirs.

A smile to silence all complaints

Like many other men of vision, Koesling encountered naysayers. His widow remembers letters in the local newspaper wondering, "When are they going to finish that eyesore behind the bank?" One City Council member was even reported to have threatened to have the half-finished structure bulldozed if the creators didn't hurry up.

And then, on July 23, 1974, a volunteer crane operator finally settled the snowman's jovial head upon the massive shoulders. Koesling climbed inside the structure to help maneuver the head so that the snowman's nose was directly above the buttons marching down the barrel chest. An amateur artist, he had already painted on the figure's beaming smile. After that triumphant day, Carol Koesling says, "There were no more complaints."

The snowman stands 44 feet high and weighs about 20 tons. Its welded steel frame supports a body made of sand and stucco. It takes about 25 gallons of white paint to give the snowman his high-gloss surface, though never at public expense. Mary Mills of the North St. Paul City Manager's Office notes that there is no line item for the snowman in the city budget, and that local volunteers have always handled routine maintenance.

> Alas, the Minnesota climate being what it is, what goes up in January inevitably melts come spring. And the town's source of civic pride came with an annual renewal notice.

If Koesling hoped the snowman would come to symbolize North St. Paul, he exceeded his own expectations. The snowman silhouette is found everywhere, from the street signs to the weathervane atop City Hall to the logo on the official residents' guide. Visit the city's website and you'll find a picture of the snowman. Visit the mayor and you're likely to receive one of the special snowman-shaped pins that he keeps to hand out to guests. From www.worldslargestthings.com to www.roadsideamerica.com, the snowman has made his mark online at Internet sites devoted to the curious byways of American travel. The snowman has also carved out a place for himself in the guidebooks and in the consciousness of people from all around the Twin Cities area.

Twenty tons of stucco and steel is sent packing—again

After his relocation in 1990 from downtown North St. Paul to the current site next to the freeway, the snowman became even better known. Ask anyone who's driven Highway 36 from St. Paul to the Wisconsin border. The traveler may not remember anything else about the trip, but the image of the giant snowman smiling genially down on the passing scene from his post by the Margaret Street turnoff tends to stick.

1995 Snow Frolics week, with St Paul Winter Carnival Royalty

photo by Ellsworth Erickson

As it happens, the snowman may soon be on the move once more. Plans to create a bridge over Highway 36, to reconnect the two halves of the city at Margaret Street, will likely send the snowman packing. If that happens, says Paul Anderson, president of the North St. Paul Historical Society, "We're sure that the snowman will be relocated again somewhere."

After all, what would North St. Paul be without the World's Most Famous Snowman?

Judy Woodward is a freelance writer living in St. Paul.

North St. Paul Snowman
Margaret Street and Highway 36
North St. Paul

by Mason Riddle

Sculptor's Quest Becomes Eagan's Success: Caponi Art Park & Learning Center

Caponi Art Park and Learning Center is fashioned from the personal vision and philosophy of its namesake, Anthony Caponi.

Caponi built his home in 1950 in Eagan, then only a village south of St. Paul. Today, Eagan's 34 square miles of rolling hills, woods, oak savannah, and wetlands are home to 67,000 residents. A sculptor and professor of art for 42 years at Macalester College, Caponi eventually owned 83 acres. In 1972, he sold 20 acres to Eagan with the stipulation that they be maintained as open space, thwarting the city's plan to use the land for a golf course. The remaining 63 acres are now home to the Caponi family as well as a sculpture park that features walking trails and a community center used for performances, gatherings, and classes.

Detail of "Pompeii," a series of bronze relief panels 70 feet long

Personal vision, private amenity—open to all

A native of Italy, Caponi hoped to realize a place of great beauty—the synthesis of creativity and nature. To this end, he put an immense amount of personal labor into the park, forging roads and shaping the land according to his sculptural and aesthetic sense. Caponi even persuaded the city to provide an underpass under Diffley Road, connecting the park's two segments. He started taking his students to the park, and soon the number of visitors grew.

Wanting to maintain the property as open space for art, Caponi approached the City of Eagan numerous times to see if it would be willing to help manage this vision. Ultimately, however, he refused to compromise with the needs of city planners, who saw the land as prime real estate for recreational space, tot lots, and similar development. By the late 1970s, Caponi had backed off from negotiations with Eagan and Dakota County because, thanks to the public money such a partnership would have entailed, his art park would have faced unwanted restrictions on its operations and maintenance.

In addition to featuring conventional sculptures, the park itself is being sculpted

The crux became this: when land is worth approximately $100,000 per acre, how can a private individual be adequately reimbursed for his investment by cash-strapped governments trying to take responsibility for a project that's open to the public? More important, how can a private vision, money aside, be maintained?

Furthermore, can the wishes and intent of a creator align with the demands and requirements of public support and, perhaps, control?

The changing nature of suburban interests: a 20-year saga

In the early 1990s, city government geared up to partner with Caponi to own and preserve the land, and both the land and the art were appraised. But the city backed off. According to Tom Hedges, city manager of Eagan since 1976, "The City Council and the City Parks Commission weren't willing to buy the land and the art at that time. Maybe the right questions weren't asked."

By the mid-1990s city and county officials were increasingly aware of the importance of Caponi's vision and the cultural and monetary value of his land. "They endorsed it and encouraged it, even to potential funding sources," Hedges explains. "But they themselves didn't have the dollars to support the venture."

In 1996, the city identified in a referendum 20 parcels of land to preserve as open space, Caponi Art Park among them. The referendum failed.

"Eagan was in its adolescent phase," Hedges says. "Passive land wasn't as high on the Richter scale as it is today. [Now] the interest of Eagan's residents is changing—the age of the residents is increasing, [and] land for passive recreation use such as art parks and nature centers is becoming more desirable."

School children gather around "A walk in outer Space," stainless steel and COR-TEN steel
photo courtesy of Caponi Art Park

Creative solutions win the day

By the decade's end, Dakota County did an about-face on land preservation, and a $20-million referendum passed. After prospective financial partners, such as Macalester College, backed out, the city and the county put $720,000 and $800,000, respectively, toward the purchase of all 60 acres of Caponi Art Park. The conditions included the continuation of cultural programming and a firm restriction on commercial and residential development on the land.

> How can a private individual be adequately reimbursed for his investment by cash-strapped governments trying to take responsibility for a project that's open to the public?

At last, Caponi Art Park's time had come. Realizing the significance of maintaining the park, the City of Eagan and Dakota County evolved into "willing financial partners," Hedges says. "They became aware that Mr. Caponi's vision was something special."

Because the city could not afford to run Caponi Art Park, a nonprofit corporation was formed in 1992 to develop it as a local and regional cultural resource, with a foundation board to direct the process of land acquisition and to oversee management. Board members are from the city and Dakota County, the Caponi family, and business leaders. The Trust for Public Land and The McKnight Foundation have supplied counsel and support.

The sale agreement reflects a commitment on all sides. In early 2005, the city and county purchased 30 acres outright through deed and mortgage. Caponi donated 10 acres. The art park foundation will purchase the remaining 20 acres from the proceeds of its capital campaign. Its board of directors will oversee the administrative piece, and the city will take care of park maintenance. Anthony Caponi will be the park's artistic director, managing all aesthetic, exhibition, and programmatic issues. And his vision will carry securely forward.

After nearly 50 years, a creative solution won the day. "No one can make something else out of it," Caponi says. "The philosophy and goals of the park will not change."

Mason Riddle is director of the Goldstein Museum of Design at the University of Minnesota, and former senior program officer for Minnesota's Percent for Art in Public Places. She writes about art, architecture, and design.

Caponi Art Park and Learning Center
1205 Diffley Road, Eagan
651.454.9412 or
www.caponiartpark.org

by Robert Silberman

Fridley's Best-Kept Secret

{Banfill-Locke Center for the Arts}

The Walker Art Center has the Sculpture Garden and Loring Park just across Siah Armajani's Friendship Bridge—but also all those lanes of traffic. The Weisman Art Museum has the mighty Mississippi at its doorstep and a grand view of the Minneapolis skyline—but also the Washington Avenue Bridge and an off-ramp that wraps the building. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts has an Olmsted-designed park across the street—but it's tightly clustered with the Children's Theatre and the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. The Minnesota Museum of American Art used to overlook Rice Park, the best exterior public space in the Twin Cities—but in the absence of a skyway, the second floor is not the best place to be, and the Minnesota Museum moved.

photo by Sue Hartley

The Banfill-Locke Center for the Arts in Fridley might well have the loveliest site of any Twin Cities arts institution—but have you ever been there? Ever heard of it? If you answered "No," that would be no surprise.

photo by Sue Hartley

"People come in all the time who say, 'I don't know how many times I've driven right by this place, and I didn't even know you were here,'" says Lia Rivamonte, executive director of Banfill-Locke. And she was talking about the locals.

It's not hard to understand why. The arts center sits along a distinctly unpicturesque stretch of East River Road dominated by factories in the dull warehouse style, and nondescript apartments and ranch homes. Yet just off the road stands Banfill-Locke's Greek Revival building with its bright white siding and shake roof. The spot is beautiful: the structure perches on one edge of Manomin Park, run by the Anoka County Recreation and Parks Board. A short walk along Rice Creek in one direction takes visitors past a picnic area, under the River Road to Locke Lake, ringed by large homes, and in the other direction through some magnificent woods to an attractive section of the Mississippi River.

A rich history draws a devoted membership

The building is on the National Register of Historic Places. Built in 1847 by John Banfill, the first state auditor, it served as an inn and tavern to accommodate soldiers and fur traders moving along the Red River Trail. Over the years it was a post office, a general store, and a community center. In 1912, the Locke family bought it and it became a dairy farm and summer home until the 1950s. The property was also used as a scout camp before being purchased in 1967 by Anoka County and turned into Manomin Park.

The site has history, and so does the arts organization that calls it home. Now in its 25th year, what was originally the North Suburban Center for the Arts started out in a basement space in Apache Plaza, the St. Anthony shopping center that was recently razed. The organization has survived because of a small nucleus of devoted members and a program of activities serving the entire northern tier of suburbs, where arts programs are rare.

The older generation of Fridley residents, the first suburbanites, are now seniors. With changing demographics and lifestyles, however, the audience for arts programs is expanding, whether that means children exploring new realms of self-expression, seniors searching for an engaging activity, or professionals looking for a creative outlet. Also, ethnic diversity has arrived in Fridley, and Banfill-Locke is beginning to address it. The arts center recently hosted an exhibition of work by African immigrants and an Asian-American Renaissance group show.

A city council member sits on the Banfill-Locke's board, and the mayor is supportive. Yet in Fridley art funding is neither a priority nor a tradition. Anoka County provides the center with $40,000 per year, some of which funds the director's position, and the Parks and Recreation Department helps maintain the building and grounds. At Banfill-Locke, Rivamonte leads but volunteerism rules, as with "The Dirty Dozen," an enthusiastic group of garden volunteers who help maintain the splendid flower beds around the building.

Minimal funding, maximum commitment

With the slogan "A place to celebrate history, nature, and the arts," Banfill-Locke sponsors about 10 exhibitions a year. They include annual group shows featuring work by members and by children, as well as exhibitions by area artists such as one devoted to the photograms of Michael and Abigail Mouw and another that presented digital drawings by Bill Gorcica.

photo courtesy of Banfill-Locke

The program is modest in scope but produces a high level of concentrated activity, a testimony to what can be done with minimal funding but maximum commitment. Writers, musicians, and visual artists get together regularly in classes, readings, and groups, such as a figural drawing co-operative that has met for decades. Unlike most museums or galleries, the center stocks not only gifts and artworks in its small shop but also art supplies. An artist-in-residence program provides studio space to a writer and a visual artist for 12- to 18-month periods, concluding with a public reading and an exhibition. Artists are expected to be active with the board and the artistic community in addition to creating their own work. There are no plans to revive the tavern or add a Wolfgang Puck café; Banfill-Locke's next goal is a modest outbuilding for a pottery kiln.

photo by Sue Hartley

On a September midweek day, I was alone in the galleries and spotted only one other in the park. A few days later, on a glorious Saturday with the leaves just starting to turn, the "Art at Rice Creek" festival filled the house and grounds with people and special attractions: storytelling, arts and crafts sales booths, readings, musical performances, artists setting up easels and painting. Inside, the galleries featured an exhibition of Craig Blacklock's North Shore photographs. For a raffle fundraiser, three volunteers created a quilt titled "Manomin Park" that presented a map of the area, complete with small representations of the center and a large silhouette of a heron, a frequent sight along Rice Creek.

> The art festival offers a demonstration of what the place can be—a true community center and a model of art at the grassroots level with a lively, welcoming spirit.

The art festival is the high point of the Banfill-Locke program year, offering a demonstration of what the place can be—a true community center and a model of art at the grassroots level with a lively, welcoming spirit. But it would be nice to go from being "a little-known treasure" to having a more visible role, not only in Fridley and nearby suburbs, but in the Cities as well.

Banfill-Locke really is only 10 minutes from downtown Minneapolis. There it is, if you are looking for it.

Robert Silberman is a member of the art history department at the University of Minnesota.

Banfill-Locke Center for the Arts
6666 East River Road, Fridley
www.banfill-locke.org

by Marlina Gonzalez

A Community's Values writ LARGE

Eden Prairie Murals!

Several years ago, Eden Prairie Schools sought to raise awareness of the five virtues—respect, caring, trust, honesty, and integrity—that are cited in its organizational values statement. In 1999, they found their answer in Eden Prairie Murals!—an elaborate community art project produced by more than 200 K–12 students and adults and guided by the Fresco Community Outreach Program.

Eden Prairie Murals! is one of three artistic partnerships developed in the past few years by the Fresco Community Outreach Program, which was founded by Deborah Boldt. All three partnerships—Community of Peace Academy, St. Louis Park High School, and Eden Prairie Schools—paired professional artists with K–12 students to paint site-specific murals inspired by the values they considered essential for a strong community.

photo by H. Navarrette

Boldt was the creator of a documentary film, *Fresco*, which captured muralist Mark Balma's creation of a contemporary fresco based on the seven virtues of St. Thomas Aquinas, for the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis. Encouraged by the film's ability to inspire discussion, Boldt founded the outreach program.

photo by Heather Olson

From the beginning of Eden Prairie Murals! there was agreement that the finished product would:

- be mobile;
- take the form of a pentatych—five panels that fit together like a puzzle but can each be exhibited alone;
- be created by a multigenerational and multicultural group of students, parents, and seniors; and
- divide responsibility for project funding and control equally between Eden Prairie Schools and the outreach program.

Community buy-in before the first brush stroke

Eden Prairie residents had a sense of ownership in the project long before the first brush strokes were applied to canvas. Teacher support was crucial, with art instructors in particular needed to strengthen outreach program organizers' efforts. Such a catalyst was found in high school art teacher Melanie Ebert. Before she had ever heard about the outreach program, Ebert had used Boldt's documentary film to stimulate class discussions around Aquinas's seven virtues. Indeed, she had encouraged her students to lie on the floor while painting on paper taped under their desks to simulate the experience of painting ceiling frescoes.

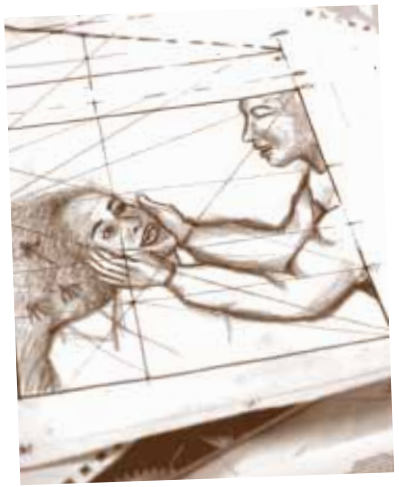
A steering committee of the outreach program and school administrators, teachers, and volunteers formed in the spring of 2000. With her strong organizational and graphic design skills, Heather Olson, an Eden Prairie parent, became the EPM! community coordinator. Under her leadership, parents volunteered their diverse expertise, from marketing and carpentry to digital photography and henna painting. Thus began a yearlong "fermentation" period as student interest blossomed districtwide.

This was a project that engaged many parts of the community. One hundred twenty-eight thousand dollars in cash contributions came from the school district, Fresco Community Outreach Program, Familink, Optimist Club, Lutheran Brotherhood, Eden Prairie Foundation, General Growth Properties, Barnes & Noble, Target, and several others. Meanwhile, in-kind contributions totaling $66,000 were offered by teachers and staff, local nonprofits, businesses, and individuals.

In the winter of 2001, public events started to get the word out. Eden Prairie High School's Center for Performing Arts hosted a presentation for parents and students complete with prize-drawings, art displays, and performances. The late mayor Jean Harris pledged her support. Eden Prairie City Center held an exhibition called "Art on City Walls." At a public ceremony called "First Brush Strokes," co-sponsored by Barnes & Noble, children and adults applied symbolic brush strokes to empty canvases the size of the actual mural while youth drummers provided rhythmic inspiration, adapting muralist Ta-coumba Aiken's spirit-drawing process. Later, attendees participated in book discussions with local writers David Mura and Marcie Rendon.

A broad palette of artists

The challenge of forming a team whose members would work together for the first time and who came from diverse disciplines, artistic styles, and cultural sensibilities presented an opportunity to model the core values the artists were to portray visually.



Sketch for "Caring"
photo by Charissa Ventura

Marilyn Lindstrom, a veteran of outreach program collaborations who is known for her strong devotion to community art, was the mural project's artistic director. Lao-American artist Malichansouk Kouanchao, or Mali, served as associate artistic director. The two led the selection of four culturally diverse artists with international credentials: Ta-coumba Aiken, Douglas Padilla, Aziz Osman, and Erica Zaffarano. Rendon conducted writing workshops, inspiring poems and stories that served as creative fodder for the young artists.

For inspiration, "Miss M" (the students' nickname for Lindstrom) brought books about murals for students to peruse. She and Mali also used exercises to coax out ideas and cultural symbols. Occasionally, the muralists met offsite at the Eden Prairie Historical Museum, where Rendon led storytelling exercises based on the memories of community elders who recalled the days when this affluent suburb was farmlands and fields.

Mural-making at the mall

The after-school project took place over eight weeks in late 2002, with separate sessions held four days a week for elementary, intermediate, and high school students. Eden Prairie Center, a shopping mall undergoing major renovations, became EPM! Central. It was the perfect locale for the large-scale production. Because the building was under construction, however, adult volunteers took turns pumping water into buckets and carrying them into the workshop space.

The final images for the mural were culled from about 500 sketches of hands, faces, cultural symbols, and nature. Some were whimsical and honest, such as a kindergartner's stick drawing of "Mom and me." Others were symbolic and polished—a pastel scene of a woman sitting quietly by a tamed tiger. Students from Somalia and India rendered henna designs with crayons.

photo by Charissa Ventura

With Miss M's deft eye and Mali's sisterly guidance, this happy confusion came together into five visually eloquent panels showcasing the five community virtues:

- Integrity—an overarching panel that sits above the other four showing a horizon of hot colors punctuated by a human figure moving toward a central point of light
- Caring—a mother cradling a young girl's face
- Honesty—a girl in a wheelchair viewing her mirror reflection and reaching out beyond the canvas
- Respect—one hand offering energy while another is accepting a flower
- Trust—two hands holding a Ukrainian egg, symbolizing one of the many cultures of Eden Prairie

Dedicating 'our Sistine Chapel'

In March 2002, hundreds gathered at Eden Prairie Center to unveil EPM! and celebrate its completion. An exhibition showed the evolution of the murals, while Kogen Taiko Japanese drummers, Raagini Dance Center, and the Eden Prairie High School Advanced Dance Class performed the core values with dance and drums. Later, each panel was displayed individually in Eden Prairie schools, focusing discussion on one core value at a time.

That May, the mural was permanently installed in the "commons" area of Eden Prairie High School. Photographs of the panels (enlarged to the size of the original art) continued to be exhibited at other sites.

In a 2002 interview with the *Eden Prairie News*, Eden Prairie High School student Sara Tibebu said of the mural, "It shows the respect we have for each other. You can see what Eden Prairie is made of. This is our Sistine Chapel."

Having been through the mural-making process, Eden Prairie Murals! offers this advice to other communities interested in undertaking similar projects:

- Devote ample time to research and development, reflection, planning, and conceptualization.
- Keep parents well informed of the time and creative commitment required of their student.
- Provide or assign a school district liaison to serve as co-coordinator.
- Develop buy-in from school administrators and parents before the project gets rolling.
- Create a separate committee devoted to fundraising.
- Most important, have clear mutual expectations between the artists and the art administrators regarding the degree of artistic decisions to be made by the lead artists and artist mentors. Community art is to be defined and created by, for, and about the community members, not the artistic team. The artistic team is there to guide and inspire.

> The challenge of forming a team from diverse disciplines, artistic styles, and cultural sensibilities was an opportunity to model the core values they had been asked to portray.

photo by H. Navarrette.

Marlina Gonzalez was the local program director for Fresco Community Outreach Program. An arts administrator, curator, and programmer who has worked at all levels of arts programming, from conceptualization to exhibition, she has worked as consultant for organizations such as Pangea World Theater, Teatro del Pueblo, In Progress, and the Minnesota State Arts Board. She is currently the digital community development manager for Intermedia Arts.

photo by H. Navarrette.

Eden Prairie Murals!
Eden Prairie High School
17185 Valley View Road
Eden Prairie

by Judy Woodward

Striking all the Right Notes: Hopkins Music in the Park

When it comes to supporting the arts, Hopkins sets it to music. Like many of the other upscale suburbs ringing the Twin Cities, Hopkins has made a commitment to the arts. And of all the performing arts, music comes first.

For 21 summers now, the Hopkins Music in the Park series has been bringing outdoor concerts to the Hopkins Downtown Park. In a setting that looks borrowed from the classic musical *The Music Man*, each summer a half-dozen or more concerts are performed free for anyone who cares to sit on the ground or the benches surrounding the old-fashioned bandshell.

Traditionally, the series kicks off in early July with a special concert by the John Philip Sousa Memorial Band to celebrate the start of Hopkins's annual Raspberry Festival. "It's very community oriented," says Nora Davis, who has been in charge of the series for the past six years and is executive director of the Hopkins-Minnetonka Family Resource Center and past president of the Hopkins Business & Civic Association. "There's red, white, and blue bunting put up for the Sousa concert, and kids from the grade school sell pop and raspberry sundaes."

At an event like that, who could doubt that the ghost of *The Music Man*'s Professor Harold Hill is lurking somewhere amid the trombone section?

Davis looks for groups with a "strong sound" when she sets the performance schedule. She keeps in mind what will work in an outdoor setting, where the musicians compete with the sounds of people having fun in the park. "This is not a chamber music venue," she says flatly.

She has talked about signing '50s legend Bobby Vee for the series, but so far most of the acts come from the metro area. Dixieland jazz is a perennial draw, as is the sweet sound of Big Band swing. The all-time favorite is the local rock 'n' roll band The Castaways, which hit the charts decades ago with a single called "Liar, Liar." Davis confesses with a laugh that the Castaways no longer look much like their publicity photos. "Now, they've all got gray hair," she says, "but they've still got that sound!"

One new act introduced by Davis has proved popular with a younger audience. "I added the Teddy Bear Band to appeal to young families," she notes. She also added noon-hour concerts to attract workers from office parks around Hopkins.

A thank-you spanning 20 years

Music in the Park was the brainchild of two legendary figures on the Hopkins music scene: Chuck Redepenning and Don Bates. Redepenning, owner of Bud's Music Center, a fixture in downtown Hopkins for almost 50 years, remembers that he and Bates, music director at Hopkins High School, were "talking music one day, as we usually did," when they came up with the idea of free outdoor concerts. "We wanted a way to thank the community," Redepenning says.

John Philip Sousa Memorial Band, Downtown Music in the Park, July 1, 2004 photo by Bill Arden

They also wanted to support professional musicians and contribute to the revitalization of the downtown area. The men took an oversized sheet of paper, folded it in half, and began sketching in the names of potential supporters from the local business community. That was in January of 1984. Twenty years later, Redepenning says, "Many of those names are still in the same spot [on the programs]."

For years, Redepenning carried the burden of organizing the series, enlisting the musicians unions as well as business contacts to share the costs. Nowadays, most of the performers are music-loving amateurs like the Sousa band, and the series is supported through contributions raised by members of the Hopkins Business & Civic Association. Davis estimates that the series costs between $4,000 and $5,000 for a typical summer season. Popular concerts can attract as many as 600 people.

Blue-collar to artsy: the changing face of Hopkins

Downtown Hopkins has come a long way from its blue-collar roots, according to Redepenning. Back in 1960, when he moved to Hopkins, Main Street supported five bars to serve a population more interested in the nearby Minneapolis-Moline tractor factory than in music concerts. The annual series has complemented Hopkins's transition from small town to upscale Minneapolis suburb.

The annual series has complemented Hopkins's transition from small town to upscale Minneapolis suburb.

Last year, the city took another step toward gentrification when it spent $100,000 to refurbish the Downtown Park and replace the portable stage with a permanent bandshell. A circular area of elegant brick pavers now provides space so that audience members can set up lawn chairs at the concerts. Money for the project was raised, in part, by ringing the audience area with "dedication benches" where, for a donation of $700, a benefactor's name appears on a plaque affixed to the refurbished seat. Eighteen of the 28 benches have already been "sold" to benefactors.

"Very artsy" is the verdict of Ray Vogtman, city superintendent of parks and forestry, speaking about the new bandshell. "The Music in the Park people and other arts organizations were major participants in the design process," he says. "For a city with a population just under 17,000, it's very impressive."

The new bandshell drew immediate plaudits from those most affected by it. "The users are thrilled with it," Vogtman says. "Even with a 75-member group like the John Philip Sousa Memorial Band, they all fit under the roof."

Theater troupes and jazz groups find a new venue

The refurbishing of the Downtown Park has led to some other benefits as well. Last summer, two additional arts organizations made their debut there. During the Raspberry Festival, Hopkins-based Stages Theatre Company put on a performance of *Measure for Measure* in connection with its Shakespeare in the Park program. And in June, the Hopkins Center for the Arts sponsored a free event called Hopkins Main Street Jazz as part of the regional Twin Cities Hot Summer Jazz Festival, organized by radio station KBEM Jazz 88. The daylong event on June 20, 2004, featured old-fashioned New Orleans–style local bands and attracted about 600 people. Corporate sponsors offset the cost, about $3,000.

Mainstreet Jazz event in the Downtown Park, part of the Twin Cities Hot Summer Jazz Festival photo courtesy of Hopkins Center for the Arts

The scene at the Downtown Park that day was a slice of Americana served up for the new millennium. "There were seniors having lunch while listening to the music, families playing ball in the background, and up in front of the stage, we had young adults who came to do swing dancing," says Susan Hanna-Bibus, executive arts director of the Hopkins Center for the Arts, Inc.

Not to mention just possibly the ghost of Marian the Librarian smiling her approval in the distance.

Judy Woodward is a freelance writer living in St. Paul.

Hopkins "Music in the Park" Series: Downtown Park at Main Street and Ninth Avenue South Hopkins

by Robert Silberman

AESTHETIC democracy delivers BURNSVILLE'S heart of the city

Until recently, Burnsville was probably not that different from many other suburbs in the United States. There was, to borrow from Gertrude Stein, "no there, there." Yes, there were residences, businesses, schools, and houses of worship—but nothing resembling a town center. The ambitious effort to develop an urban-style area as the "Heart of the City" therefore is all the more striking.

Having just celebrated its 40th anniversary, Burnsville appears a perfect example of the American suburb facing middle age. According to town planner Tina Goodroad, the community is 98 percent developed, so it makes sense to focus on redevelopment. The demographics are changing, with baby boomers becoming senior citizens and with social diversity increasing. As commuting grows more time consuming, people want amenities closer to home. This often leads to a suburban version of the so-called New Urbanism, the movement devoted to pedestrian-friendly communities based on an old-fashioned model of small-town life.

Development hews to retro postmodern urbanity

At the heart of the Heart of the City redevelopment area, a zoning district established in 1999, is Nicollet Commons Park, made possible by a $2.5 million Livable Communities grant from the Metropolitan Council. On the north side, a liquor store was rebuilt in a style that follows the new design code. To the east, rental and condo townhouses are being constructed with the help of a $1.6 million grant from the Metropolitan Council, which is promoting high-density development and affordable housing. To the south stands Grande Market Plaza, a commercial-residential complex with an urban feel. The architecture suggests the 1920s or earlier, but with contemporary touches such as exposed steel beams. The retro postmodern urbanity of the Heart of the City development is pleasant enough, although I wish it were more daring.

Untitled by Robert Larum bronze, 2001, at Burnsville High School

Photo courtesy of the City of Burnsville

The park benefits from a 1.5-acre hillside site that sets up the main feature, a waterway flowing from the base of a sculpture and then down and around a circular plaza/performance space. The sculpture, *Centrifuge* by Foster Willey, Jr., is intended to represent, in the artist's words, "the character and spirit of Burnsville, a vibrant center expanding, growing, and defining its identity." Rhetoric aside, the sculpture is fine for what it is: a logo-like attention-grabber and punctuation mark.

> The promotion of Heart of the City strikes a balance between its economic significance and its contribution to quality of life.

Nicollet Commons and Heart of the City each have banners that hang from old-style lampposts in the area; along with planters and illuminated snowflakes, the banners are a project of the Burnsville Foundation. The Heart of the City project developed out of a 1990s effort to dress up the streets with plantings and holiday lights. Before that, the Partnership for Tomorrow, a group of landowners and developers, was already discussing ideas like those now being realized.

Dueling polemics in public art

Usually, planners propose but developers dispose. Burnsville, however, seems to be

proceeding with a genuine plan and genuine partnerships between interested parties, including arts groups. The contrast between the new sculpture for the new park and a slightly older sculpture nevertheless illustrates a familiar pair of artistic alternatives and public art processes.

The choice of an abstract sculpture such as *Centrifuge* may seem adventurous, and maybe it is by Burnsville standards. But it is a lyrical work in a familiar version of modernism, and as a bronze it has the cachet of "serious" fine art.

The other work is something else again, and was largely responsible for the establishment of the Burnsville Fine Arts Committee. Richard Ames, founder and president of an enormously successful Burnsville-based construction company, decided to donate a statue to his hometown. In 2001, he did just that. He picked the artist, Robert Larum; picked up the bill, donating $250,000 to the Burnsville Foundation; had the sculpture installed at Burnsville High School; and even provided a free public barbecue after the opening ceremonies.

By showing a farmer behind two Percheron horses pulling not a plow but a road grader, the monumental statue pays tribute to the role of the construction industry in transforming Burnsville from a farming community. A plaque states, "The construction industry has always been the engine that drives America's prosperity." The suggestion that a woman be included to acknowledge the role of women in the development of the community went nowhere.

"Centrifuge," during installation
photo by Foster Wiley, Jr.

As an act of civic pride and generosity combined with self-aggrandizing egotism, the Ames project would be tough to match. I am especially fond of the *Burnsville Bulletin* statement that fans of the artist "are expected to travel to Burnsville from around the globe to see this sculpture," which suggests possible confusion between Mount Rushmore and the corner of Burnsville Parkway and Pleasant Avenue. Yet as traditional heroic sculptures go, the Larum is more than satisfactory. Ironically, the same judgment could be passed on *Centrifuge* as a representative of modernism. The two sculptures offer clear alternatives, however, with residents free to respond as they wish. That is aesthetic democracy.

"Centrifuge," by Foster Wiley, Jr., bronze, 2004
photo by Jerry Mathiason

We are not the art police

Gift horses should be reviewed, as the Trojans learned to their sorrow. After the Ames gift, it was thought wise to monitor future donations, lest all the town's public spaces be filled with monumental tributes to butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers. And so the Burnsville Fine Arts Committee was born. Yet Bonnie Featherstone, head of the committee, insists, "We are not the art police." The committee advised Heart of the City on Nicollet Commons and supervised the selection of *Centrifuge*, paid for by a foundation established by developer Amir Marafie (who has no role in the Heart of the City project and insisted the donation be anonymous until the work was installed).

In the suburbs, as Featherstone observes, the arts can be "off the radar." The promotion of Heart of the City strikes a balance between its economic significance and its contribution to quality of life, with the arts as a lifestyle amenity. The arts are becoming more visible, and there is the promise of other projects to come. The committee has selected a second artwork for the park, though it has yet to be funded or submitted for city council approval. The overall plan for Nicollet Commons includes a sculpture garden as well as an arts center, also yet to be funded. Meanwhile, what already has been achieved in Nicollet Commons Park and Heart of the City is impressive. It suggests that for the community as a whole and the arts in particular, in Burnsville the news about revitalization is: "So far, so good."

Robert Silberman is a member of the art history department at the University of Minnesota.

Burnsville's Heart of the City
Along Nicollet Avenue, between Highway 13
and Burnsville Parkway
Burnsville

by Mason Riddle

Public Art comes to {Hennepin Co. Libraries}

In 1988, the Library Foundation of Hennepin County was established to raise private-sector support to benefit the entire Hennepin County Library system, which includes 26 libraries. In 1999, the foundation's first three public artworks were installed in Ridgedale Library. Since then, public art, all paid for by private sources tapped by the library foundation, has been installed in seven of the libraries.

How did public art grab hold of Hennepin County libraries? Inside champions, community supporters, and lots of moxie by library staff.

"Land, water, sky," by Phil Daniel, cast glass, 2004 at the Wayzata Library

Around the time that Ridgedale Library unveiled its public art, three or four more county libraries were slated for renovation. Hennepin County Library Foundation board members Jeffrey Scherer and Chip Brink, citing Ridgedale's success, declared public art an important element of all county libraries—not just as adornment, but as an integral resource for library patrons.

"Art is as much information and content as are books," says Scherer, who was the library foundation's president from 2001 to 2003. As such, he contends that art shouldn't be "ghetto-ized" or viewed as an "expendable accessory."

Detail of "Chants of the Prairie," by Craig David, cast concrete with natural stone mosaic, 2003 at the Eden Prairie Library

Luckily, Scherer and Brink found an ally in Hennepin County Commissioner Mike Opat. "Art gives license to dream, to be creative," Opat says. "It should be in a library."

All for 1 percent, 1 percent for all

In their push for public art, the trio, consulting with others, adopted the state's Percent for Art in Public Places model. The model allocates 1 percent of hard construction costs of a building, in this case taken from the county's capital funding/bonding appropriations; this resulted in purses of $7,000 to $90,000 a project.

Scherer, Brink, and Opat crafted the language for the legislation, which won approval first from the library foundation board, then from the Hennepin County commissioners. According to Mike McConnell, coordinating librarian at Brookdale Library, Commissioner Opat "really drove" the process. The library foundation and private individuals supplemented the funds allocated to public art.

With money in hand, next came artist selection.

For each library project, a committee comprising library staff, the building architect, community members, city officials, and sometimes artists or art professionals drew together. An independent consultant, Jack Becker of FORECAST Public Artworks, led the process, presenting an overview of public art nationwide for the committees to review.

"The public art committees are basically citizens who wouldn't normally have a good way of working through and assessing the process," says Margaret Tefler, interim director of the library foundation's board. "It was FORECAST that would bring everyone together."

Next, under the direction of each library's head librarian, the committees identified one or more sites for public art. A request for qualifications listing information about sites and each project's requirements and budget was sent to area artists. From a shortlist of respondents, several artists submitted design proposals,

receiving a fee for their work of $250 to $1,000, depending on the project's scope.

With close involvement from the project architects, the committees then made their selections, contracting one or more artists to fabricate and install the public art projects.

"The county commissioners trusted that the local libraries could manage the process. There was no need for micromanaging," Scherer says. "The projects were completed responsibly and professionally."

Untitled stone mosaic, David Culver, 2003 at the Eden Prairie Library

Librarians, feeling the strain, enjoying the rewards

Though proud of the work that resulted, library administrators shouldered much of the process, which sometimes felt like a burden. Some grumbled about the daylong review of artists' designs—"too much in one day"—and about deadlines that kept getting extended. County money was sometimes slow in coming, further postponing installation of the artworks.

> In selecting art by committee, sometimes choices were unanimous, other times not. Before long, another art was honed—that of compromise.

"If the public art dollars had resided with the library, the process would have run more smoothly," says Marcia Wattson, agency head of the Edina Library.

For Trudy Hanus, the agency head of the Wayzata Library, the "biggest surprise" was that "the whole thing was handed over to me. I had to form the committee, follow up on everything, and after the artist was selected, manage the rest of the process."

Then there was the challenge of selecting art by committee. Sometimes choices were unanimous, other times not. Before long, another art was honed—that of compromise.

"It is never easy to get good art by committee, but the Brookdale public art process was fabulous," McConnell says. "It worked beautifully and we got fabulous art."

According to Wattson, Edina patrons are also raving. "We have heard nothing but good stuff about the art, even though it is all very different," she says.

Wattson is eager to supplement the installation with labels and other didactic materials to educate visitors about the art. The materials are, like a lost library book, a couple of years overdue.

Mason Riddle is director of the Goldstein Museum of Design at the University of Minnesota, and former senior program officer for Minnesota's Percent for Art in Public Places. She writes about art, architecture, and design.

Stained glass window by Michael Mills, 2002 at the Hopkins Library

Coat rack in the children's area of the Eden Prairie Library, tile mosaic by Melissa Bean, metal books by Marlaine Cox, 2003 photos by Jack Becker and Melissa Bean

There are six Hennepin County Libraries referenced in this essay: Brookdale, Eden Prairie, Edina, Hopkins, Ridgedale, St. Louis Park, and Wayzata. www.hclib.org

by Gülgün Kayim

Where Nature is Nurtured

Ramsey's Discovery Garden

Ramsey is a fast-growing community making the transition from rural to suburban. Typical of many developing third-ring suburbs, it draws newcomers, particularly young families, to its affordable, abundant new housing; easy access to good transportation routes; attractive natural resources; and good schools. Between 1990 and 2000, the population grew by almost 50 percent, from 12,408 to 18,510 residents; it is projected to reach 30,900 by 2020. The current median household income is just shy of $70,000.

Bordered on the east by the scenic Rum River and on the south by the Mississippi, Ramsey contains 565 acres of municipal parklands and trails within its city limits. Fifteen percent of the city is protected wetlands, offering an abundance of attractive natural open spaces that knit neighborhoods and community resources into a connective web.

Ramsey also operates five community parks, each dedicated to a recreational sport while incorporating mixed-use play areas for families.

Detail of sign graphic during design phase, by Kate Christensen

Take me out to the garden

Baseball is the draw at Alpine Park, which contains four diamonds on its linear 80-acre site to accommodate leagues, teams, and pick-up games. A quarter-mile bike path and hiking loop connects the park to the city's extensive greenway network. The topography consists of wetlands on the western border amid stands of oak and evergreens and, on the east, a naturalized habitat. Immediately adjacent to the park, dominating the western vista, is a large landfill.

Gardens to wetlands
photo courtesy of Regina Flanagan
Art - Landscape - Design

According to the park commission's five-year development plan, despite its bounty of baseball and biking, what Alpine Park needed was a new play area for young children. Mark Riverblood, supervisor of Ramsey Parks and Utilities, sparked the idea of developing a play area on the park's eastern edge that would respond to the unique assets of the three-acre site. He asked artist and landscape architect Regina Flanagan to develop some ideas; thus, Discovery Garden was born.

> A nearby school focused on environmental education inspired many of the garden's design motifs and features, including native plants and a butterfly garden.

Flanagan began by breaking down the Discovery Garden site into three functional components: play area with seating boulders and a wooden play structure; two looped hiking paths; and native and ornamental plantings. In keeping with the garden's environmental theme, materials used to construct the park are recycled or from sustainable resources. Because the garden is designed to attract people of many generations and abilities, all paths and more than 50 percent of the play structure are accessible.

Nearby school inspires public art

Today, thanks to funding from the Ramsey Park Trust Fund, Discovery Garden is a peaceful, thoughtful retreat. It features a greenway connection and hiking loop extending the existing bike path through the garden and into the park. Overlooks along the bike path offer seating areas made of natural materials, such as recycled stone and wood, and are surrounded by native plantings. The play area includes a bridge and an elevated wood lookout known as the "Rangers Tower," and a sandbox surrounding the play set contains hidden treasures. Child-scaled seating

carved from boulders by sculptor Peter Morales allows for close observation of nature underfoot and in the air.

Recognizing that the layout of the path system could function as a game board, Flanagan invited conceptual artist and graphic designer Keith Christensen to join the team. For inspiration, he turned to nearby Ramsey Elementary School, which has a curriculum built around the natural environment.

Design for kiosk game by Keith Christensen

Christensen created a three-dimensional game that invites children to move through the landscape. In it, he incorporated ideas and imagery gathered from the school's curriculum, such as native plants, animals, birds, and other organisms. Human effects on the landscape, including the adjacent landfill, are also elements of the game.

The game's rules and information about the garden appear on a kiosk at the entrance. Players follow marks stenciled on the pavement to stopping points along the path at the Butterfly Garden, the Wetland Overlook, and the Listening Grove. Christensen's elegant signs, featured on columns and seating, signal a route where players are rewarded for their exploration of the garden and its surroundings.

According to Flanagan, the inclusion of Christensen's game in Discovery Garden "is implying there are games in all of our lives." And not just those with a ball and bat.

Site from path photo courtesy of Regina Flanagan Art-Landscape-Design

Gülgün Kayim is a multidisciplinary artist specializing in site-specific performance. She is co-artistic/managing director of Minneapolis-based Skewed Visions Performance Company and curator of Intermedia Arts' Art Inside/Outside Space Commission Program.

View of oak trees photo courtesy of Regina Flanagan Art-Landscape-Design

Discovery Garden
Alpine Park
6600 Alpine Drive NW
Ramsey

by Thomas O'Sullivan

A Secret Garden in Suburbia

Richfield's Kirchbak Sculpture Garden

Asphalt and automobiles dominate the intersection of 66th Street and Lyndale Avenue South in Richfield, a Minneapolis suburb of 35,000 residents. Chain stores and high-rise condominiums constitute the bustling suburban streetscape.

But hidden from easy view by a bank, housing, and a McDonald's is Kirchbak Sculpture Garden. The private haven of plantings and artworks is open to the public without gates to restrict access or signs to announce its presence.

"The Gardeners," by Jan Hess Roth, 2001, photo by the artist

Kirchbak Sculpture Garden honors Bill and Garnett Kirchner, Richfield civic leaders, avid gardeners, and world travelers. Bill died in 1999; Garnett, now in a nursing home, lived in an apartment overlooking the garden when it was first completed. (The garden's name refers to the Kirchners and Jerry Jerpbak, with whom Bill founded Richfield Bank and Trust Co.) When the Kirchner family and their business associates decided to develop the 11.5-acre Woodlake Centre site with an expanded bank and medical building plus restaurants, housing, and a parking ramp, public art seemed a natural component.

"Our concept was an urban village where you could live, work, and play," developer Jan Henry Susee told the *Richfield Sun-Current* at the garden's dedication in September 2001. "We thought it was appropriate to include art in the concept."

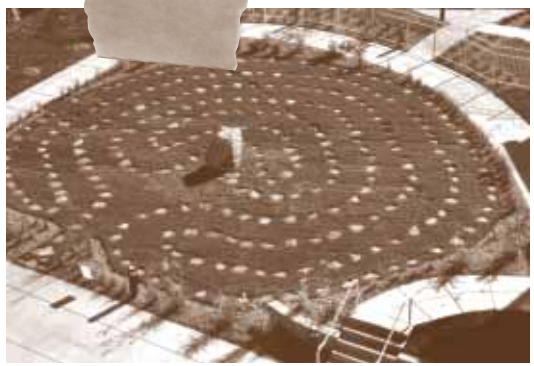
Boundless spirit amid suburban bustle

For inspiration, Susee cites the Walker Art Center's sculpture garden and municipal percent-for-art programs. He and fellow developer Steve Kirchner, son of Bill and Garnett, allocated 5 percent of the project cost to a sculpture garden that now contains more than $300,000 worth of purchased and commissioned art. As a public amenity, the private initiative reflects the values held by the Kirchners, described by Susee as "community driven in everything they did."

Having founded Kirchbak Gardens, Inc., as a nonprofit organization, the developers worked with FORECAST Public Artworks to establish a broad framework for the sculpture park and a process for selecting local artists. "We wanted to have Minnesota artists," explained Richfield resident Tim Bumgarner, a son-in-law of the Kirchners who served as project coordinator. "We wanted to spend our money here."

A request for qualifications that circulated in spring of 2000 outlined "a broad philosophy of valuing, growing, nurturing, and celebrating." Seventy-five artists responded and, from a group of more than 40, the Kirchbak organizers selected 10 Twin Cities artists. The one exception to local talent was a sculptor from Heredia, Costa Rica, Richfield's Friendship City.

The garden space—a block-long rectangle crossed by three main walkways—is bounded by The Oaks (138 apartments), The Pines (78 assisted-living units), and a parking ramp. A stand of tall oak trees lends continuity while river birches and other recent plantings mature. The generous size of Kirchbak Sculpture Garden affords space for two environmental works, an area with statues and seating, and individual works that accentuate the views.



"Stone Labyrinth," by Derek Young, landscape with plantings, 2001, photo by Jack Becker

Tall stainless steel pieces anchor the axis across the garden's north-south dimension. *Jet Stream*, a kinetic totem by Bruce Stillman, stands within view of 66th Street to beckon sharp-eyed passersby. Norman Holen created *Arbor Image* as a schematic tree in stainless steel whose shapes pay homage to the massive oaks for which the apartment complex is named. Between the bright steel pieces, Zoran Mojsilov's *Napoleon* is a ground-hugging assemblage of

boulders and quarried stone beneath the old oaks. "I want it to be inviting for people to walk up and explore it," says Mojsilov, who shaped three seats within the sculpture to accommodate visitors.

Gardens within the garden: eden in suburbia

Two artists made gardens within the garden. Derek Young, a landscape architect and earth artist, designed a labyrinth of stepping stones embedded in the lawn. This meditative space is enclosed by tall grasses and punctuated by a massive boulder. Young also contributed a sculpture that translates the Chinese calligraphy character for "Garden" into COR-TEN steel. His playful transformation of brush stroke into massive metal speaks to the travel interests of the Kirchners, who visited China many times. At the crossing of two paths, sculptor/horticulturist Craig David installed *Keepers of the Garden*, a small evergreen garden with carved limestone figures and building fragments. The life-sized keepers, a nude woman and man carved in relief, lend a whimsical touch of Eden to suburbia.

Figural works occupy the seating area parallel to the sculpture garden's east-west walkway. A life-sized bronze gardener by Jane Frees-Kluth kneels in a patch of flowers along the path. The Kirchners' grandson posed for her "sentinel of Kirchbak Garden," wearing Bill's gardening clothes for authenticity. Two bronze statues nearby embody the garden's global concerns. *Allianza*, by Guillermo Hernández González of Heredia, Costa Rica, is a female figure clad in huge coffee leaves. Barefoot to express humility toward other cultures, the bronze is topped by a dove signifying peace. Minneapolis artist Douglas Olmsted Freeman also treats international exchange in the garden's most recent addition, a 2004 bronze called *Seeking Peace: Jaguar and Wolf Journeys*—two sisters in animal masks, one balancing on the other's shoulders to represent North and South America.

> Skeptics who find their way to the garden are impressed. 'A sculpture garden here? Why? Then you get there and you understand.'

Several pieces link the sculpture garden proper with other elements of Woodlake Centre. Steven Woodward furnished a patio at The Oaks with smooth granite works that serve both as benches and as weighty minimalist forms. Based on the form of an open book and embellished with incised quotations, the small sculptures also evoke children's blocks in their simplicity. Heidi Hoy and Nicholas Legeros designed five stone-and-bronze benches for The Oaks. Limestone seats harmonize with the architectural setting, while rootlike bronze legs link the benches with the stand of trees nearby.

One of five limestone benches with cast bronze backs by Nicholas Legeros and Heidi Hoy, 2001 made by Jack Becker

A conundrum—getting the secret out

The art initiative at Woodlake Centre extends indoors. A colorful terrazzo floor with owl, squirrel, rabbit, and turtle designs by Andrea Myklebust and Stanton Sears enlivens a lobby in the medical building. The developers sought to encourage residents' own collecting by paying artists from St. Paul's Lowertown a small fee to hang work on consignment at The Oaks. This strategy brought a few sales, but Susee described the response as disappointing.

The atmosphere of "secret garden" at Kirchbak is part of its success, yet also a concern for its founders. As Bumgarner says, "You can drive by on 66th for years and not even know it's there. One day you look and, Shazam!" He and Susee appreciate the calm of this "island in a sea of concrete," as Bumgarner calls it, but wish it were more widely recognized. Both acknowledge that the recent acquisition of Richfield Bank by an out-of-state corporation has dampened the initiatives they set in motion. Plans to commission a mobile for the medical building's lobby were scrapped; hopes for a gathering place in the garden, such as a gazebo or a trellis, remain unrealized. But no one has regrets. Susee has commissioned artworks for the new offices his firm will occupy across Lyndale Avenue.

Bumgarner calls developing art for the public "a very rewarding experience no matter how you work it. You don't have to be a nonprofit and get so exotic about it. You can buy pieces you like, when you can."

With its suburban location, private initiative, and commitment to local artists, Kirchbak Sculpture Garden offers a rare example to other communities. Bruce Palmborg, Richfield's director of community development, views the garden as an effective example of public art and a feature of suburban development. Skeptics who find their way to the garden are impressed, he says. "A sculpture garden here? Why? Then you get there and you understand," he says. Its success has raised the consciousness of public art as a viable feature of Richfield's growth.

Thomas O'Sullivan is a curator and writer based in St. Paul.

Kirchbak Sculpture Garden
66th Street and Lyndale Avenue
Richfield

by Moira F. Harris

Lindstrom's Larger-than-life Couple

Karl Oskar & Kristina

Since 1990, anyone who has taken Highway 8 from north of Forest Lake to Lindstrom has driven on the Moberg Trail. Signs in brown and white show the outlined figures of Karl Oskar and Kristina Nilsson, the major characters in Vilhelm Moberg's four novels about Swedish immigration to the Minnesota territory. The series inspired a later Swedish film popular with American audiences, *The Emigrants*. Karl Oskar and Kristina stand on a brick pedestal in front of the *Chisago County Press* office in Lindstrom, surveying the main street of the home they journeyed so far to reach.

Karl Oskar and Kristina stand on a brick pedestal in Lindstrom, surveying the main street of the home they journeyed so far to reach.

Swedish immigration to Minnesota began in the 1850s, just before statehood. A century later Swedish writer Vilhelm Moberg came to the Chisago Lakes area to recapture in fiction the adventures of the pioneers from Småland. While researching, Moberg stayed in the Melander house in Chisago City, traveling the roads of the county by bicycle. A bronze statue of the author, holding his bicycle as if ready to ride away, stands on a stepped platform in Chisago City's town park. This statue, by local artist Ian Dudley, was unveiled in September 1996. A week later, King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia of Sweden, visiting Minnesota as part of the 150th anniversary of Swedish immigration to America, dedicated the park itself to Moberg's memory.

A sculpture hewn by the homeland

The two literary figures of Karl Oskar and Kristina were first given artistic form in 1959 when Swedish sculptor Axel Olsson's bronze monument to them was placed by the harbor in Karlshamn, Sweden, the town from which the fictional emigrants set sail on the brig Charlotta. Nearby is the Swedish Emigrant Institute, which now houses Vilhelm Moberg's papers. The Olsson statue (called Utvandrarna in Swedish) shows Karl Oskar gazing out to sea while his wife turns back for a last glimpse of the homeland they are leaving.

photo by Sara Hartley

Moberg's novels were published in English to great acclaim between 1951 and 1961. Visitors, both American and Swedish, soon began tracing their own Moberg trail from Stillwater to Lindstrom, looking for scenes that had inspired the author. In 1963, Lindstrom decided to change its summer festival's name and focus. Instead of the generic "Water Carnival," Chisago County's largest town would now hold "Karl Oskar Days." The new name, it was felt, would attract tourists as well as remind the community of its past.

During the renamed festival's second year, donations were sought for a statue of Karl Oskar. In 1966, the Nilssons made their debut at a Lions Club dinner.

Dressed for success in 'Amerika'

Roger David of White Bear Lake designed the 8.5 - foot statue, imitating a model of Olsson's bronze original. Karl Oskar and Kristina wear their "Amerika" clothes: a jacket, shirt, and pants for him; a jacket, long skirt, and wool shawl for her. The shawl covers her shoulders and head as she turns to look back toward home. Karl Oskar's boots suggest the knee-high oak-bark-tanned ones Moberg wrote that his hero ordered in Sweden before departure. Karl Oskar polished them a shiny black before the ship arrived in New York. Although the emigrants brought little with them, at least the boots, of fine Swedish craftsmanship, would be noticed when he wore them while walking on the rough roads in America.

The figures were molded of polyurethane foam, later covered with fiberglass at the Plastic Products plant in Lindstrom. A few days after the unveiling, the brightly painted forms of *Karl Oskar and Kristina* rode the company's float in the Lindstrom parade, earning a first-place ribbon.

Just as the parade was ending and the annual fire department water fight was about to begin, a flash of lightning struck a tree near the parade route, splitting it with such force that it smoked. The rains followed, thus christening the statue on its first outdoor appearance.

David's statue rode in Karl Oskar Days parades until 1970, when Willard Smith, president of the plastics firm, gave it to the city. The statue was then painted to more clearly resemble bronze and placed on the Main Street pedestal, where it remains today.

Popular symbols beckon tourists—*Välkommen*

The *Karl Oskar and Kristina* statue has become both town symbol and trademark for Lindstrom as the town has increasingly emphasized its Swedish heritage. The house Moberg designated as theirs is now called Nya Duvemala (or "new" Duvemåla, after Kristina's hometown) and was moved to a site near the Glader cemetery, where early Swedish settlers were buried. A brochure lists the sites that visitors interested in the Moberg stories will want to see, and each of the county towns proudly lists its Swedish Sister City link on signage.

photo by Sue Hartley

Also beckoning tourists is Lindstrom's 1908 water tower, which gained a coffeepot spout and handle when it was repainted with a rose-maling design in 1992. Not only is Swedish coffee always on but, as the slogan states, tourists are welcomed—in Swedish, "Välkommen till Lindström."

K. Oskar statue unveiled

photo courtesy of Chisago County Press

The *Karl Oskar and Kristina* figures are not exact duplicates of those in Olsson's work. The American Karl Oskar is pudgier and his face lacks the worried expression of the Swedish original, while the treatment of Kristina's shawl and skirt is not as graceful as in Karlshamn. These departures may be a result of working from a small model and of the qualities of the fiberglass.

In 1974, when the Swedish sculptor learned of the Lindstrom version, he felt that his work had been "perverted" and hoped that Lindstrom would remove its *Karl Oskar and Kristina* from view. That didn't happen and, as a local woman recently remarked, removing the statue for needed repainting is even problematic. During the summer, so many visitors want to pose for photographs in front of it that restoration work must wait until fall.

Moira F. Harris, Ph.D., is an art historian. Among her books are *Museum of the Streets: Minnesota's Contemporary Outdoor Murals* (Pogo Press, 1987) and *Monumental Minnesota: A Guide to Outdoor Sculpture* (Pogo Press, 1992).

Karl Oskar and Kristina
12631 Lake Boulevard
Lindstrom

by Shelly Willis

PUBLIC ART COMES TO Life in St. Louis Park: Allegory of Excelsior

St. Louis Park is the birthplace of comedian Al Franken, three-time Pulitzer Prize–winner Thomas Friedman, and now a major public artwork by Minnesota artist Andrea Myklebust.

It is rare that communities outside metropolitan areas plan for public art. Yet in December 2003, the City of St. Louis Park, a suburb of Minneapolis with 44,000 residents, struck a deal with TOLD Development Co. to include public artwork in a new project at the center of the suburb.

The artwork is part of the Excelsior and Grand/Park Commons East project. The designer is Elness Swenson Graham (ESG Architects, Inc.), with landscape design by Damon Farber Associates. They've created a compact pedestrian-oriented mixed-use development close to the street, with retail space at ground level and residential above. The centerpiece is green space, or a "town green," connecting the major thoroughfare, Excelsior Boulevard, with an existing public park to the north. Ringing the nucleus is a traffic circle.

The city's support of public art was a stroke of luck, according to Bob Cunningham of TOLD Development. "It takes a tremendous amount of time to fold public art into a private development project," he says. "The City of St. Louis Park deserves all the credit for making the project happen."

Honing the focus, choosing the artist

The process for selecting artists began in December 2000 with the hiring of FORECAST Public Artworks. FORECAST formed a committee that included Cunningham, the project's landscape architect, the design architect, the chair of the city's Parks and Recreation Commission, and other community representatives.

The committee chose different sites within the development for artists to address. Opportunities and ideas for potential artwork sites included paving and street bollards, lighting, a trellis, and the traffic circle in the middle of the development. FORECAST recommended hiring artists at the beginning of the design process.

A St. Louis Park City Council study session set the following criteria "for items to represent and be credited as a public art initiative":

1. The specific piece should be more than simply functional and decorative.
2. The artist should be involved in the design.
3. There should be a public review of the artwork.

FORECAST invited more than 300 artists to submit their qualifications. Forty-five did, and four finalists were selected to formally apply for the commission.

"Allegory of Excelsior," by Andrea Myklebust; cast bronze, gold leaf, and steel, 2003
photos courtesy of the artist

The four artists, all Minnesotans, were Andrea Myklebust, a sculptor, designer, and public art specialist; Douglas O. Freeman, a sculptor and fountain designer; Dean Holzman, a set designer, lighting designer, and woodworker; and Foster Willey, Jr., a sculptor, woodcarver, and bronze relief artist.

> The City Council needs to create policies encouraging the funding of art in public spaces and ongoing incentives for such funding to come from private development.

Each artist was paid $3,500 to develop proposals for the sites. Committee members expressed enthusiasm about several of the proposals but favored one from Myklebust, unanimously choosing her for the project in December 2001.

A sculpture clad in bronze and hope

Myklebust began working on designs immediately after September 11, and the terrorist attacks couldn't help but influence her ideas. She wanted to make something hopeful, without political expression, and soon focused on thoughts for a figurative sculpture. She conceived four proposals in a four-block area: designs for sculptural bollards, pavement

inserts, and guardian wolves (a nod to a treasured public space in the city known as "Wolfe Park"). However, it was her idea for a sculpture at the center of the traffic circle that caught the committee's attention.

The focal point of Myklebust's design is an eight-foot-tall cast bronze female figure, clothed only in a thin coat of gold leaf. The sculpture's smooth, curvy body floats in a sea of vertical, tubular stainless steel reeds atop a 27-foot-high steel base. Myklebust gave her figure a stoic, sharp-featured, classical face, eyes gazing downward. A tight cap hugs the woman's head, bordered by a crown. The sculpture, which features no details at ground level, is best viewed from the second-story residential units in the surrounding buildings.

Myklebust drew a thematic parallel between her sculpture and the name of the nearby thoroughfare—"Excelsior," from the Latin meaning higher. The figure, she says, "expresses the ideal of striving for excellence, reaching beyond our own expectations, and entering the unknown with a spirit of optimism and change."

Before the sculpture made its way to the plaza, Myklebust altered her design several times to address concerns from the selection committee and the St. Louis Park City Council. Initially the figure was bald, then hair was added, removed, then changed again. To appease concerns about a ground-level view of the female form, Myklebust added a bronze sunburst to shield parts of the figure from the public's gaze.

Modifications, Myklebust says, are a normal part of the process. "I am accustomed to making changes for practical concerns," she says. "But I felt myself dig my heels in at suggestions that she should have clothes."

Head detail, "Allegory of Excelsior"

Out of the comfort zone, near Excelsior Boulevard

Nancy Nelson, a member of the selection committee and former chair of the city's Parks and Recreation Commission, said the sculpture "screamed St. Louis Park, not Andrea Myklebust. It is new, a little bold, and makes you step out of the comfort zone."

In March 2002, the sculpture's fabrication began. *Allegory of Excelsior* was installed and dedicated in 2003.

"Allegory of Excelsior"

Public art is a function of good planning, according to TOLD Development's Cunningham. Without sufficient time, he says, it's unlikely public art will become standard in private development. And without city support, he adds, this particular sculpture would not have been possible.

This project illustrates the combination of forces that ensures a successful artist selection, placement of the artwork, fabrication, and installation:

- City support and funding for the project
- Enthusiasm and support from the developer
- The artist's ability to communicate ideas and work with city officials

Still, despite the acclaim for Myklebust's sculpture, the next three phases of the Excelsior and Grand/Park Commons East development project lack funding for public art. This will likely come only from a more comprehensive plan by city officials to integrate art into the fabric of St. Louis Park. The City Council needs to create policies encouraging the funding of art in public spaces and ongoing incentives for such funding to come from private development.

The result will be an integration of public art that is not only an enhancement but also an extension of a community's voice, an instigator of dialogue and audience participation, an educational tool, a trigger for memory, and a marker that inspires a city to define itself.

Shelly Willis manages the University of Minnesota's Public Art on Campus Program at the Weisman Art Museum, including the development of temporary and permanent public art on campus throughout the University of Minnesota system.

Allegory of Excelsior
Excelsior Boulevard and Grand Way
St. Louis Park

by Susan Banovetz

A Mayor's dream becomes a REALITY

Vadnais Heights City Hall

Something extraordinary happened in Vadnais Heights: works of art were integrated into our new city hall, a $3.3 million facility that opened in March 2001.

The art goes far beyond placing a statue-on-a-stick in a lobby. It involves artists Michaela Mahady's 250-square-foot stained-glass window; Tim Harding's 9-by-6-foot silk representation of the surface of a pond; and Fuller Cowles's and Connie Mayeron's granite mosaic-faced reception desk and planter-seating structure.

Inspired, the community embraced the project. People were invigorated by what happened. Today, they remain proud of what our new civic home and the art woven into it say about who we are.

The public art project started as a dream of mine when we first began talking about building a new city hall. Frankly, I was a bit skittish about how the idea would be received. In fact, during my campaign for another mayoral term, a friend advised me not to talk about public art. "You'll become known as the Art Mayor," he cautioned.

Stained glass by Michaela Mahady

Nonetheless, I forged ahead because I treasure the role art plays in life, and I believe its incorporation into city spaces is important for those who live and work there.

The dream became all of ours

I had nothing to fear. Once the community got involved, the dream became theirs. Ideas flourished, excitement snowballed, and the dimensions of my dream expanded greatly. The initiative took a lot of time and much dedication, and I can point to several reasons for success.

First and foremost, we couldn't have done this without community leadership and involvement. A task force of residents; business, City Council, and staff representatives; and city hall architect David Kroos determined which artists to consider, interviewed them, and recommended artists to the City Council. The task force gave the artists direction and forwarded the concepts to the council. Task force members were outstanding liaisons, working hard to provide information to the community. So professional in how it conducted business, the task force gained the City Council's full trust—no easy feat. I would be remiss in not mentioning the important leadership provided by the City Council, which was involved and interested in every detail. It provided $35,000 of the project's $145,000 cost.

A good share of the success owes to the fact that the art reflects community values. The task force developed a list of community values, namely the beauty of our city's lakes, wetlands, and natural habitat. The art mirrors what the community holds dear, engendering a great deal of pride and helping to provide a sense of identity. And homegrown artists were selected; that was important too. The task force made a wise decision when selecting extraordinary artists from the northeast metro area. This really wasn't a difficult task, given the abundance of talent and skill there.

Part of the community's engagement in this whole process is a result of information-sharing efforts to keep residents abreast of developments. Every step of the way, information was communicated through newsletter articles, cable television interviews, and flyers inserted in utility bills. Also, we took our show on the road, appearing with professional displays at pancake breakfasts, school carnivals, and open houses. Organizations and businesses also stepped up to the plate. The city's businesses, service organizations, and residents raised $110,000 for the project.

And finally, we must thank Public Art St. Paul and its executive director, Christine Podas-Larson, who shepherded this project along every step of the way. Christine's guidance, commitment, and knowledge were instrumental to our success.

Our city hall has brought special attention and recognition to Vadnais Heights. People stop by just to look at the art. Special events are held here because of the art and the building's beauty. Our city hall has been featured in newspapers and in Public Art St. Paul publications. Art exhibitions and shows are staged regularly in our community's home.

Putting an imprint on 'Unweave the Weave'

With the successful completion of our city hall, we moved on to a much bigger project—the integration of public art into the Minnesota Department of Transportation's "Unweave the Weave," a public works project to completely redesign and expand the I-35E/I-694E interchange in Vadnais Heights. This major reconstruction will transform a freeway interchange that now involves six lanes of traffic and about six bridges into 12 lanes of traffic, about 10 bridges and "flyovers," and two to three miles of noise walls.

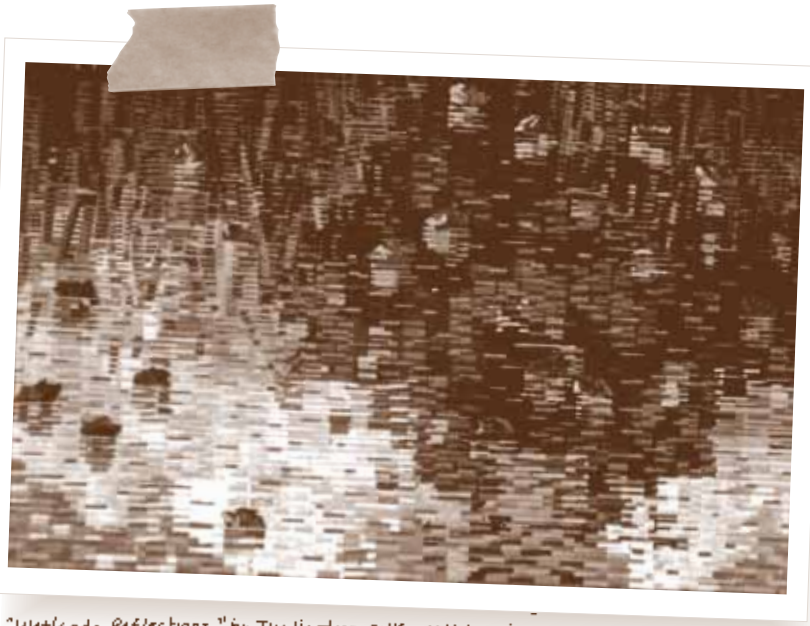
Taking advantage of dollars available from the Minnesota Department of Transportation for local communities to enhance freeway projects, Vadnais Heights contracted with Twin Cities artists Stanton Sears and Andrea Myklebust to design form liners for the bridges' parapets. Once completed, the parapets will feature impressions of environmental highlights of Vadnais Heights, including images of pine cones, oak leaves, and lily pads.

Sears and Myklebust also designed special bridge railings to reflect the Vadnais Heights environment. Depending on the eye of the beholder, the railings will resemble grasses blowing in the wind, waves, or other images of nature. What's more, sections of the noise wall that will ring large parts of Vadnais Heights will be softened with a pine tree motif and geese sculptures.

> Inspired, the community embraced the project. People were invigorated by what happened. Today, they remain proud of what our new civic home and the art woven into it say about who we are.

As in the city hall art project, a task force was involved with architects and engineers to give it a true Vadnais Heights imprint and to soften the look of concrete and metal. Thanks to so many, our city hall public and freeway art projects truly reflect the community that thousands of people are proud to call home.

By the way, it would be an honor to be known as the Art Mayor.



"Wetlands Reflections," by Tim Harding, silk wall hanging
photo courtesy of the City of Vadnais Heights

Susan Banovetz has been in elected office for more than 20 years, the last eight as mayor of Vadnais Heights. She is also director of media and public relations for the University of Minnesota's College of Liberal Arts and serves on Public Art St. Paul's board of directors.

Vadnais Heights City Hall
800 East County Road E
www.cityvadnaisheights.com/abt_cityhall.asp

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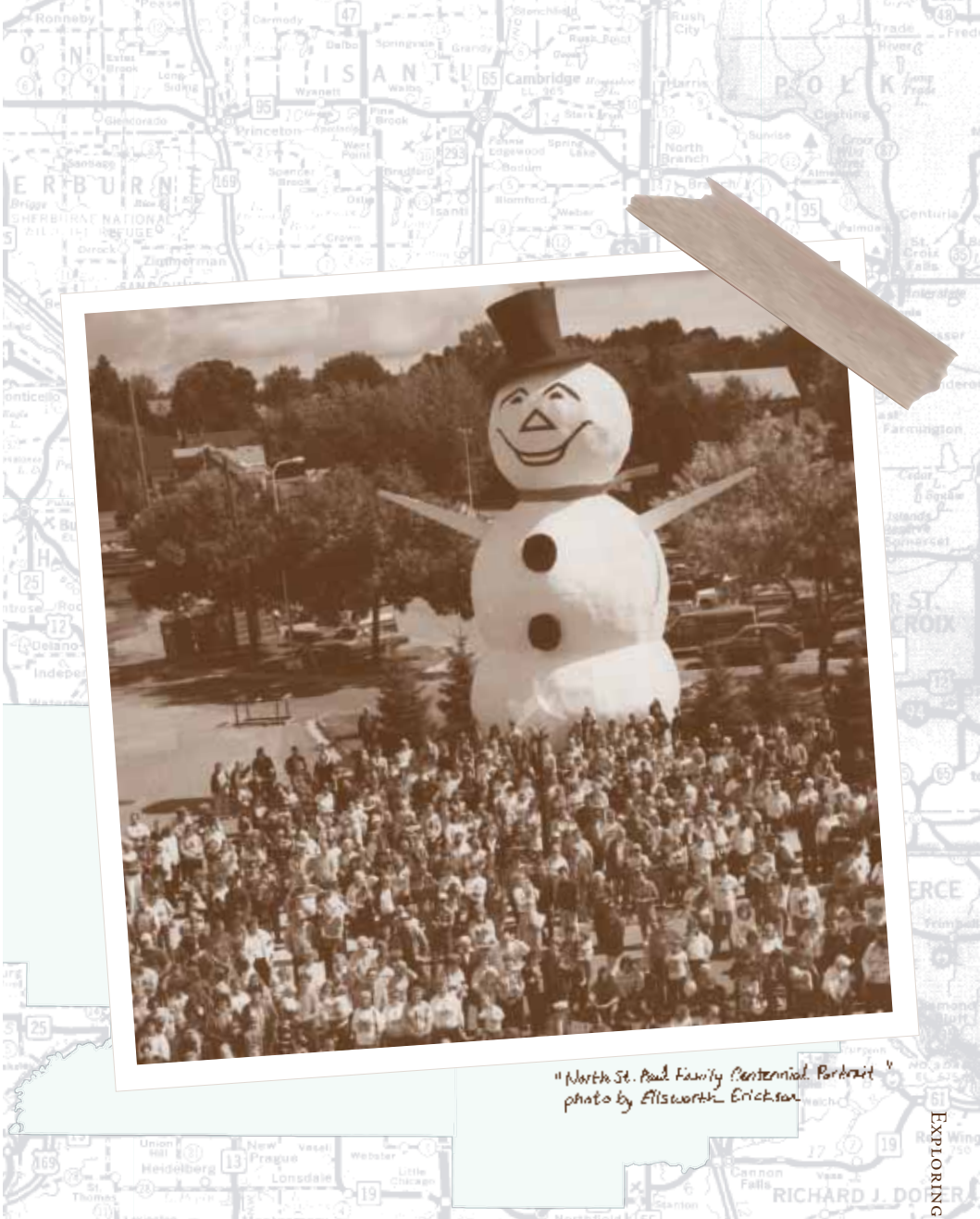

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