

Group looking to place sculpture in public places

Art in the open gives a town a sense of mystery, the element of surprise that is missing in so many historic places like Wilmington. But when one local sculpture program kicks in, our lack of public art will be another historical blip.

The "Sculpture in Downtown Wilmington" program is a collaborative effort of photographer Matt Dols (owner of Tabula Rasa) and the City of Wilmington's Parks and Recreation Department. The program's aim is placing temporary revolving sculpture installations in several downtown locations such as Bijoux Park, Riverwalk Park and the road median on Market Street between Third and Water streets.

Notable local sculptors such as Paul Hill and Dumay Gorham III have signed on to create the sculptures that will remain on display in six-month shifts. Permanent sculpture bases will be installed in each area so sculptures can be switched out periodically.

"My personal long term goal is to make art a part of everybody's daily life; to see and appreciate the arts," Mr. Dols said.

The first part of the project begins in mid-June with the installation of sculptures in Bijoux Park on the 200 block of Front Street. The second part of the project is getting sculptures near the Riverwalk. The third stage will be getting sculptures in the Market Street median.

Coincidentally, downtown public art was already a part of the City Council-approved Downtown Vision 2020 Plan, said Wendy Larimer, program specialist with City of Wilmington Downtown Services.

"Public art and cultural arts, in general, is listed in the Vision 2020 plan, and since Wilmington is certainly listed as an arts community, public art should play a role in that," Ms. Larimer said, adding that money from her Parks and Recreation budget would be allot-

PAINT OUTSIDE THE LINES



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ted to "assist with the logistics and promotion of the entire project, whatever cost that is." For instance, the sculpture bases are going to cost \$200 each, a cost Ms. Larimer said the city would cover. A group of students in the master of public administration program at University of North Carolina

Wilmington have applied for a \$2,000 N.C. Arts Council Grassroots Arts grant to fund part of the program.

But the city isn't going to let just any art be placed in public areas. Choosing art and artists will be a juried process.

"Because all these pieces are on public property, the city will always be involved in placing them," Ms. Larimer said. "We're not going to encourage people to come down and just plop sculpture anywhere they want to."

Eventually, Mr. Dols envisions leasing the sculptures from the artists for six months. At the end of each lease, the sculpture would either be returned to the artist or donated to the program for auction. The money from the sell of the sculptures would go back to the program, making it self-funding.

UNCW's economics department is finishing a survey asking area residents about the desire for such a project. I'll keep you posted on the results.

MORE PEDESTRIAN ART

Ms. Larimer has another public art project up her sleeve.

In 2006, she's planning to begin a public mural program in our numerous downtown parking decks to "make the parking decks a little less threatening," she said.

She'll do a call for artists when the project begins. The chosen artist will draw the design on the parking deck wall, and Ms. Larimer plans to enlist the talents of New Hanover County high school kids to do the painting.

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