



Key West artist honors the island's literary heroes

By Gwen Filosa and Pierre Taylor
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Key West artist Craig Berube-Gray this week is installing new works of art, which double as benches, in the butterfly garden outside City Hall, 1300 White St. The benches appear to be made of books written by people who have lived on the island.

The granite benches, which city staff said cost the city \$28,000 for both, are his sculptures that depict oversized books written by people who have lived in Key West.



“I wanted to go with something that hadn’t been done before in Key West,” he said Friday, taking a break from his power tools and lifting the heavy pieces together. Berube-Gray, dressed in work boots, jeans and a T-shirt, said, “Oddly enough there is no one place that recognizes the literary history of Key West, and so what better location than city hall that was once a school.”

The shout-outs cover legends like Ernest Hemingway and also contemporary writers like the acclaimed Judy Blume — who owns a local bookstore — and mystery novelist Michael Haskins. Frank Deford, the late sports journalist who called Key West home, is

part of the sculpture, as is Thornton Wilder, who wrote the play "Our Town," and James Kirkwood, the novelist and co-author of the Broadway smash "A Chorus Line."

"I have [Margaret] Truman, Harry Truman's daughter, she wrote this book called 'Women of Courage,' and it's like the 'Profiles in Courage' for women. It was written in the 1950s. She was a major feminist."

The benches were installed as part of the city's "Art in Public Places" program, which requires all new construction to pay 1 percent of building costs to purchase art pieces.

"Employees use that park every day, having lunch or reading or talking on the phone," said Liz Young, the city's administrator of the Art in Public Places advisory board.

Young said Berube-Gray's public art installation is the third one at City Hall and the first one to go outside, although a John Martini sculpture was donated by a local couple and is planted near some entrance doors.

The other public art is in the front lobby and the city clerk's office. Big historic murals are coming to the hallways.

So far, four artists have been commissioned for projects that total \$126,000, Young said. More art is to come at City Hall, which cost more than \$19 million and is a complete, eco-friendly renovation of the old Glynn Archer School.