

Public Sculpture Project in City is growing, but needs help to continue

By Rob Hedelt
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My family likes to give me a hard time about being the last one to notice new things. That's the case with the Fredericksburg Arts Commission's Public Sculpture Project, well into its second year, with six new pieces on display at different spots in the city.

I may have looked at one or two of the sculptures last year, but it took catching up with one of the project's organizers to learn more about it.

Preston Thayer, a Fredericksburg resident and career art professional, is part of a group in the city's Arts Commission who worked with a host of arts and government entities to make rotating, yearlong displays of sculpture a reality. The Public Sculpture Project now has six works of art on display at various spots in the city, up from four in the project's first year.



CR Gray with "Popsicles" at Dixon Park.

The new sculptures, which were installed in mid-October, range from colorful Popsicles of stucco, concrete and steel to water shapes in stainless steel.

Thayer, who managed art museums at Radford University in Virginia and at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, said support for the program has come from many different groups and institutions. He said Fredericksburg's Economic Development Authority has provided the funding for the first two years to provide a \$2,000 honorarium for each of the artists whose works are chosen for display.

Thayer said Fredericksburg's City Council members have been supportive of the project, and that the city's Parks and Recreation and Public Works departments have helped find good spots and install the sculptures.

"One thing we don't do is transport the pieces here or get them home," said Thayer. "It's very clear in the application process that that is the responsibility of the artists chosen."

Thayer said members of the Fredericksburg Arts Commission and others involved with the public sculpture project helped put together a jury to handle the applications each year, with as many 80 artists from around the world applying for the program. While there is no stated purpose of picking pieces that show artistic diversity, the range of styles in the applications made for a wide variety of art.

"I think we've had an interesting selection of pieces these first two years, and we hope to continue that as the program moves forward," he said.

That continuation will take a bit more effort, and require some help from the community, as the city's funding ends with this year's display.

"The idea was always that they would help to get this started, and then it would be up to businesses, groups or individuals in the community to take over and fund it," said Thayer, who noted it will take \$2,000 per year to fund each piece of sculpture. "We really hope that civic groups, businesses or people who want to support this public art will step up."

Thayer said Fredericksburg has "a vibrant artistic community," something he thinks the program of rotating public sculptures only accentuates. He knows people won't love each and every piece, but he hopes the variety of sculptures will make people look, think and appreciate what they add to the community.

"We chose places where large numbers of people would see the art, and also in spots managed by, or at least easily accessible to, the city crews who helped us with the installations," he said. "We can't thank them all enough for the help in making this happen."

Anyone interested in sponsoring the next round of public sculptures can get in touch through the Fredericksburg Arts Commission's website at fredarts.com.

For more information on this year's sculptures and their locations, go online to fredarts.com, click on "Arts Commission" and then "Public Sculpture Project."