

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

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“It was made to brighten your day.” Summitt Sculpture Walk aims to bring joy

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JULY 06, 2020 05:00 AM , UPDATED JULY 07, 2020 09:17 AM

‘Popsicles’ was inspired by roadside attractions — Americana,” says Berube-Gray, a Key West, Florida, artist. “I wanted to create something that could have been along the highways of our nation — marking stopping points. I could see this sculpture in front of a roadside ice cream shop.”

For now, the sculpture is in front of Lee’s Summit City Hall. It’s one of six pieces in Sculpture Walk, a new outdoor public art program. The exhibit, on display through March 2021, features artists from across the country. A new rotation of sculptures are expected to arrive each spring.

“Having a temporary or rotating outdoor public art program has been a growing trend among cities in recent years,” says Glenda Masters, the Lee’s Summit cultural arts manager who led the effort.

“It is a relatively easy, low-cost way to bring public art into a community as the artwork is not purchased, merely exhibited on loan with a small stipend being paid to the artist to cover installation costs.”

Masters said the Downtown Sculpture Walk is funded in part by grants from the Downtown Community Improvement District and Lee’s Summit Industrial Development Authority. Lee’s Summit also partnered with the Lee’s Summit Arts Council and Downtown Lee’s Summit Main Street for the exhibit.

Nick Parker, the Lee’s Summit Arts Council’s chairman, says public art has long been a priority for the group. “These downtown pieces, located in the heart of our city, are really just the beginning,” he said. “Art plays a huge role in any community, both aesthetically and economically, and this sculpture walk is just one more thing to help drive traffic into one of our vital commercial districts.



Additionally, in this time of high stress and uncertainty, we hope these pieces can help bring a little joy and comfort to our residents and visitors — and maybe even a little distraction.”

Berude-Gray says the accessibility and his sculpture’s intent is important. “People young and old don’t need a degree to understand this fun, colorful piece,” he says. “It was made to brighten your day.

Masters brought expertise to the project.

Before coming to Lee’s Summit in 2018, she worked for two local governments in Colorado, both of which had longstanding outdoor sculpture exhibits that brought in new public art each year.

“Plus, I have been to several communities locally and abroad that have similar programs,” Masters says. “When I came to Lee’s Summit as the city’s first cultural arts manager, one of my responsibilities was to create cultural programming for our community. I saw this as an opportunity to introduce 3-D public art to our community.” Planning began last August, with members of the city’s Public Works Department, Downtown Lee’s Summit Main Street and Lee’s Summit Arts Council Public Art Committee walking through downtown to select six highly visible sites that offer potential for public engagement.

Several city departments, as well as the exhibit’s partners, reviewed and gave feedback on the locations. Once the sites were chosen, a national call for sculptural artists was made in December. Applications came from 52 artists across the country.

An eight-member jury committee composed of members of the Lee’s Summit Arts Council public art committee and the Downtown Lee’s Summit Cultural Arts committee selected the six sculptures, taking into consideration where each piece might ultimately be installed.

“Consideration was made to curate the exhibit with intention, by pairing sculptures with locations that appeared to be a good fit,” Masters says. “For example, a 10-foot long velociraptor absolutely stands out next to the fire station. Combining dinosaurs and firetrucks was a great way to invoke a nostalgic childhood element, appealing to kids and adults of all ages.

“Also placing a sculpture as large and vibrant as the 9-foot tall “Popsicles” on a large open sidewalk next to our City Hall creates an informal gateway into the downtown district and creates a fun and whimsical feel.”

The City of Lee’s Summit also has partnered with Otocast to create a free virtual public art guide that can be downloaded to any mobile device. The app includes an interactive map of the exhibit, photos of each sculpture and audio descriptions recorded by the artists.

For more information about the Sculpture Walk, go to cityofls.net/cultural-arts/public-art/emodule/4426/egallery/451