

The Northern Virginia Daily

'PAC-Man' installation a first for Woodstock

LOCAL NEWS

AUG 13, 2015



Sculptor Craig Gray places the finishing backpack element on his "PAC-Man" sculpture in Woodstock's Jane Garden. Rachel Mahoney/Daily

WOODSTOCK – After an installation ceremony held Thursday afternoon, the Jane Garden will host Woodstock’s first piece of public sculpture art.

Sculptor Craig Gray installed the sculpture himself starting at 9 a.m., cementing stone pieces into a sculpture titled “*PAC-Man*” with a receptive audience traveling on Route 11.

“I was very fortunate to meet a lot of people coming through today, and I have to say first that the community pride here is amazing,” he began at the afternoon presentation.

Gray told those gathered that “*PAC-Man*” embodies the spirit of the traveler, citing a comparison with Woodstock’s John Muhlenberg.

Four other “*Rock-Men*” sculptures reside at various locations throughout the country, and Gray said that because of their low maintenance and sturdiness, they are ideal for outdoor public installations. The Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Arkansas recently purchased another “*PAC-Man*” sculpture from Gray, where it was previously on loan.

Woodstock’s “*PAC-Man*” is one of a kind: Gray gathered many of the pieces from in New England and a few stones from the Shenandoah River itself.

“Passing thought here when I was a kid, we would always drive the Blue Ridge Parkway and it was amazing, the similarities between both areas; the rockiness, the rivers,” he said to those assembled. *“You’ve got a little bit of Woodstock in the sculpture.”*

The sculpture stands at more than seven feet tall and the weathered, smooth surface and rounded edges of the stone will gain a patina and character with age.

Gray wasn’t quite finished cementing the sculpture together for maximum stability at the Thursday presentation, so he demonstrated some of his process for the crowd during the presentation. The town of

Woodstock will be cleaning the piece and putting on the finishing touches at the park.

When the enhancement committee installed the garden at the end of last year and commemorated it to Jane Beasley's 15 years as coordinator, they still were missing one final piece.

Katie Mercer, the town's current enhancement coordinator, put out a call to artists in March to seek out a piece that would suit the garden. After deliberating with committee volunteers over 17 pieces by 10 different artists, they finalized Gray's approval in mid-July and made plans for installation.

Woodstock's Public Works Committee poured out the statue pad last week and had it ready for Gray to assemble "PAC-Man" on his way down from Massachusetts with his family.

Mercer said that because the committee has been so busy with preparing for this installation, they haven't yet had time to discuss future plans for public works of art in Woodstock.

"It's something that I definitely believe in," she said. "We all have a very big interest in starting a public art program in Woodstock."

Beasley said that they hope to set up statues in a similar manner at other parks, and that this is an ideal location to welcome the majority of traffic heading northbound into the town and provide a good first impression.

"We think that it will be an attraction for people coming in to town, as well as for the people who live here to stop and have photos taken," she said.

Gray has confidence in the stability of his sculpture to withstand the weather — and anything else Woodstock might dump on it.

"If you decide to cover him with Christmas lights, it really doesn't bug me," he said. "Have fun with it!"

“PAC-Man” will remain at the park to greet Woodstock visitors and residents for a two-year installation period, after which another sculpture will replace it.

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