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## Public embracing Greenwood trail sculptures

By RYAN TRARES

Daily Journal staff writer

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Cecilia Lueza's art titled Landing greets Polk Hill Trail runners and walkers. The Greater Greenwood Arts Council wants to do another public arts project at the Worthsville Road interchange similar to what's on Polk Hill Trail. Scott Roberson / Daily Journal

Like a swirling flame of bright orange and yellow, "Landing" rises from the landscape along Greenwood's Polk Hill Trail.

Farther down, a long, lean 12-foot-tall figure seems to trudge forward. Another sculpture, a geometric bear balancing on rocky crag, is mounted nearby.

For pedestrians on the trail and drivers on adjacent Smith Valley Road, the sculptures have become a part of their daily commutes, exercise routines and background.

But by the end of April, the works will be gone.

The sculptures are part of the Art on the Trailways program, an effort by Greenwood arts supporters to help beautify the city and nurture creativity on the southside.

All three will be replaced by new sculptures. As the first round of the program ends, organizers are looking at initial goals and thinking about how to make the initiative even better.

"People don't realize the sculptures are going away. They've gotten used to them being there," said Angela Stelljes, board member for the Greater Greenwood Arts Council. "But that's a strength of the project. By installing new sculptures, it creates that newness, that spark of seeing something you don't expect from that space to generate conversation."

From his home, Chad Shaffer has to walk only a few minutes to reach the Polk Hill Trail. He and his wife, Rebecca, often take their four children for walks or bike rides along it on the way to nearby Craig Park.

They've been on trails all over the city. But Shaffer's kids, ranging in age from 5 to 2 weeks old, have a particular fascination with the sculptures lining the Polk Hill Trail.

"It creates more of a family atmosphere. It's a nice change from walking past stores and strip malls," he said.

That was the response organizers of Art on the Trailway envisioned when it started coming together in late 2011.

Rob Taggart, director of Greenwood Parks and Recreation, came up with the initial idea. He wanted to find a way to spruce up a stretch

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of trail along Smith Valley Road. The trail was used by residents, but he saw a potential for even greater use.

What if they could find a way to expose the public to world-class art while making the trail itself a destination, Taggart suggested.

Working with the arts council, they came up with a plan to attract finished artwork from throughout the country to install in Greenwood.

A major donation from the Franciscan Alliance and help from the Johnson County Community Foundation and other sponsors covered the \$13,900 cost of installing and leasing the pieces. The arts council paid \$3,000 to each artist to lease the sculptures.

Call-outs were placed on major art websites and message boards. More than 20 artists from as far away as Florida submitted 43 works for a panel of judges to choose from.

The three pieces were each picked for a different reason.

"Landing," created by Argentinian sculptor Cecilia Lueza, depicted a child figure in colorful mid-leap.

Beth Nybeck's "Point Defiance" appeared at first glance to be a huge boulder perched on a point but in reality was a rust-colored bear meant to catch people's eyes.

"Strider II" by John Merigian is a fitting submission for a trailway, as it shows a long, lean figure leaning forward in repetitious movement.

With the success over the past two years, it was natural to extend the project for another two years.

Since December, Stelljes has been collecting submissions from artists for this next round on the art trail. Once the deadline to enter ends on Sunday, the five-person judging panel will select which pieces fit best for Greenwood and that space.

Organizers would like to expand the trail and include more works, but that will depend on the quality of submissions they receive, Stelljes said.

Sponsors have continued to support the art trail. In November, the Greenwood Park Board presented a \$5,000 donation to help expand the program.

Installation is again slated for mid-April, with a communitywide celebration of the arts planned for April 26.

While the installations have achieved the initial goal of beautifying a Greenwood trail, organizers are also excited about the attention each has drawn to the arts.

"Public art can ignite conversation. Through that conversation and awareness, the arts can grow," Stelljes said.

The Greater Greenwood Arts Council spent weeks last summer calling more than 700 local residents, getting feedback on their opinions of the arts in the area. People gave suggestions about music to include in the parks department's concert series or the desire to get more theater events.

But the common thread was how much they noticed the art trail.

"Everyone had their favorite pieces, but no one was negative about it, wishing it would go away," Stelljes said. "It helps give a stronger sense of community."

Most people whom she's talked to have a story about the art trail. It has become part of the fabric of Stelljes' everyday life.

When Stelljes and her children leave the Greenwood library to go home, they could take any number of routes to the east side of the city. But her kids always clamor, "Drive past the sculptures," she said.

Relatives and friends who visit their house always get a tour of the art trail. Stelljes has photos of them all posing with the works of art.

"It changes your view of a space and gives you a smile," she said. "Those are things that I've done, and I've heard lots of other things from other people as well."

Art events also have grown in the past two years, starting with a biannual celebration called Arts Alive!

Music, fabric arts, painting and sculpture were showcased at locations throughout Greenwood. When it started in 2012, the event not only helped unveil the new sculptures but exposed people to arts opportunities they never knew existed, Stelljes said.

Events such as the annual WAMM Fest, which showcases more than 50 local artists, and Art in the Park at SS. Francis and Clare Catholic Church provide more opportunities for artists to display and sell their works.

The Southside Art League, which has fostered the arts in the area since 1964, maintains a small gallery that features new exhibits from area and traveling artists.

The Greenwood Public Library has expanded its exhibit hall, filling the corridor just off the main library lobby with local artwork.

"It was a blank hallway, great way to have an interactive element with out community," said Valerie Moore, reference librarian. "We're a community library. Being able to promote local artists is something that fits in with our mission."

In May and June, the library organized an event called, "Draw Greenwood." The point was to invite the community to submit their drawings of the city and the features they loved about it. The works depicted everything from parks to quite stretches of road to cherished events such as the annual holiday lighting.

When Shaffer and his kids decided to submit drawings, they chose to look at the stretch of trail that they've grown to love. Shaffer's image of the "Landing" sculpture, silhouetted against a winter scene, captured how much the art trail has impacted him.

"Those sculptures add more to the city. I think the city needs to do more of that kind of thing," he said.



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