

ART ON THE CORNER

Grand Junction, Colorado

Grand Junction's downtown is home to a variety of wildlife: An eagle, a pig, a coyote, a buffalo, and an elk named "Spike". The fauna are not roaming wild in the streets, however, but are sculptures in Art on the Corner. This unique outdoor sidewalk sculpture exhibit on Main Street and other downtown sidewalks was started in 1984 by a local sculptor and other local and regional artists. It now includes over 100 works of art, about 30 in the annually rotating exhibit and 75 in the permanent collection.

The popular exhibit was one of the first of its kind in the nation to display sculpture on City sidewalks, and has been copied extensively throughout Colorado and the country. The collection includes a wide range of artwork, from realistic bronzes to abstract stonework to found object pieces and whimsical art. Annually over half a million people view this dynamic public art display which has been recognized nationally and internationally.

Art on the Corner is a year-long exhibit, free to the public. Begun during a time of economic downturn, Art on the Corner has helped revitalize the urban core and has been a catalyst for attracting businesses, tourists, and new residents. It is the signature of downtown and one of the most visited attractions in Mesa County. In 1998 the exhibit garnered an "Excellence in Public Art" award from the International Making Cities Livable organization.

CALLS FOR ENTRIES & ELIGIBILITY: In January each year, a call for entries is sent throughout Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. The exhibit is open to any and all professional and amateur artists in the country, and each artist may enter two pieces. Sculptors lend their work free of charge, and AOTC covers installation, insurance, and promotional costs. Artwork is juried into the exhibit based on artistic merit, quality of workmanship, originality, durability for outdoor display, and public safety considerations. There are no size limitations.

INSTALLATION: One Saturday in May the selected sculptors deliver their artwork and help with the installation. Volunteers, welding crews, and organizers gather downtown for the all day "sculpture change", and the new Art on the Corner pieces go on display. Downtown restaurants provide a breakfast buffet at the check-in table for artists and volunteers. Sculptors coming from out of town are given a hotel room at no cost and the Downtown Development Authority hosts a reception for the artists to celebrate the new exhibit.

Artists are required to have their sculpture on a flat mild steel base which can be tack welded to a round steel pedestal, or, for pieces over six feet in height, bolted directly to the sidewalk. Various local metal fabricators have manufactured the steel pedestals, which range from one foot in diameter by four feet tall to four feet in diameter by two feet high, with several sizes in between. There are also several large round two foot high concrete pedestals with steel X's imbedded into their tops so that sculpture can be welded to them. Placing the sculptures on pedestals makes them more visible and somewhat more protected from wayward vehicles, climbing children, etc.

The pedestals are painted dark gray, and each year a team of volunteer painters follows the installation crews to wash and touch up the pedestals. Pedestals – like the taller sculptures – are bolted directly into the sidewalk and the nuts are welded to the bolts to prevent removal. When the exhibit changes, the mounting bolts are simply ground off level with the sidewalk, or the tack welds are ground off level with the top of each pedestal.

The sculpture change happens in conjunction with the annual Art on the Corner Art & Jazz Festival, which also takes place on Main Street and features an array of artwork for sale, food booths, arts and crafts booths, and continuous live concerts by area jazz bands.

MAINTENANCE & FUNDING: The Downtown Development Authority maintains and administers Art on the Corner, through the Art on the Corner Committee, and the DDA is the primary funding source for the program. The new sculptures are all for sale, and a 25% commission on sales helps fund continuation of the exhibit, including installation, printing brochures, name plaques for each piece, insurance, maintenance and repair of permanent pieces, and administration staff.

The City of Grand Junction provides insurance for both the temporary and permanent pieces, and the Downtown Development Authority covers the \$1,000 deductible. The exhibit averages one or two claims yearly, from cars that jump the curb and accidentally hit a piece to vandalism. Art on the Corner is careful not to accept any pieces which might be breakable or easily damaged, but the unforeseen is always a possibility. Local artists are an excellent source of volunteer help in repairing work that gets broken or damaged.

The annual budget for the Art on the Corner program is around \$75,000 - \$90,000 and there is one fundraising event – a golf tournament – which raises about \$5,000 - \$7,000. The Downtown Development Authority's annual costs for the program includes a ¼ time staff person, \$6,000 to print brochures, \$2,000 - \$3,000 in installation expenses, \$2,000 - \$3,000 for repairs and maintenance, \$2,000 - \$3,000 for insurance, \$4,000 in prize money and a \$500 honorarium for each artist, with \$50,000 - \$60,000 allocated to purchase sculptures each year such as the "People's Choice" or other pieces. Through fundraising, private donations, and DDA and City funding, Art on the Corner continues to grow and flourish.

MARKETING, ACQUISITIONS & AWARDS: In 1989 a major community fund raising campaign purchased the first official "PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD" piece: Lou Wille's "Chrome on the Range" buffalo which stands in front of the Wells Fargo Bank. Wille was so impressed with the outpouring of public support for his buffalo that he donated \$3,000 to seed the "LOU WILLE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE", an annual cash award of \$500 to a sculptor in the rotating exhibit, plus cash prizes for FIRST, SECOND, and THIRD place "BEST OF SHOW".

The annual "PEOPLE CHOICE AWARD" is aimed at acquiring one new piece each year for the permanent collection. The public votes for their favorite sculpture and financial donations are encouraged. Numerous additional works have been purchased privately--by individuals, families, or businesses--and donated to the permanent display.

The Downtown Development Authority produces a colorful brochure promoting the exhibit. This brochure is free to the public and distributed through the DDA, local museums, Main Street stores and galleries, hotel and restaurant brochure racks, the Art Center, and the Chamber of Commerce. The DDA is also includes the exhibit on its website www.downtowngj.org.

The AOTC Committee gives guided tours of the exhibit for schools, clubs, convention groups, and others throughout the year. Articles about the exhibit have appeared in numerous magazines and publications both locally and nationally. The AOTC program has purchased or sold over 80 sculptures valued at over half a million dollars during its two decades.

For more information about AOTC please contact:
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