

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF SCULPTURE
by CANDACE TIPPETT – GRANITE FALLS NC

Take a fall day in North Carolina's welcoming foothills. Add a colorfully landscaped city park with a paved walking trail hugging a serene lake. To this natural beauty, bring imaginative creations of professional artists and amateurs dabbling purely for enjoyment. Welcome to Caldwell County's Sculpture Celebration, marking its 30th anniversary in Lenoir on September 12, 2015.

"The fact that this show has been around for 30 years is testament to its quality," says Mike Roig, a renowned sculptor from Carrboro, NC who has entered his moveable sculptures nearly every year since 1995. His tree-like sculpture on heavily traveled Highway 321 North is one of the most visible in a county ranked exceptionally high for its collection of permanent outdoor artwork. Another famous piece is "Across the Grain," an earth cast sculpture created on site and installed in downtown Lenoir by internationally acclaimed sculptor Thomas Sayre.

Roig says the Celebration is unlike any other. "It is a great collection of art and a good place to make connections." He says the public can meet and talk with artists in a relaxed setting, and artists very often come away with commissions for new work and can connect with each other. "I still have work percolating from last year's show," he says.

Co-sponsored by the Tri-State Sculptors Association, Mountain State Sculptors, and the Caldwell Arts Council, the event is held in Lenoir's T.H. Broyhill Walking Park.*

"Having the sculpture celebration here in the gardens at the Broyhill Walking Park is like a marriage between God and man's creative handiwork. Everyone who attends feels the connection. Sculptures are nestled among the landscaping so that each one is like a new discovery," says Sheila Triplett-Brady, Executive Director of the Broyhill Family Foundation.

"Each year is better than the last, and I marvel that our small community offers such a unique experience. I enjoy watching the sculptors bring in their works, some on trucks so that they are swaying as if on a float in a parade, finding their niches, and displaying their art."

The show has always been known for its high quality, but the caliber of artists keeps notching up. Pieces vary from less than one-foot in size to more than 15 feet, and materials range from polished wood and metal to animal bones, consumer cast-offs and all types of found objects. Subjects range from carved granite statues and serious steel pyramids to creations of pure whimsy. Realistic and contemporary, stationary and movable, indoor and outdoor – all can be found there.

Tom Risser travels from close to South Carolina each year to be part of the show. Every year he says he can't wait until September to participate. "I love the energy," Risser says. "Being around other artists makes me feel supported for taking on this crazy passion. I don't go to sell things – though I do often – I go to see the artists, meet the public, and share stories. **I get inspired by the work of so many great artists and I love seeing the joy on display in the work and in the hearts.**"

Each year, nationally recognized artists exhibit alongside novices competing for coveted merit awards and sales. Sculptors come from Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, Maryland, Virginia, Missouri, and all the southeastern states. And since the show is non-juried, anyone is welcome to compete. This year, about 70 artists are expected to enter up to three pieces of artwork each.

Carl Peverall says he first learned of the Celebration 20 years ago after moving to the North Carolina mountains from New York City. "Among the many other art events in our region, this one stood out as

being dedicated exclusively to outdoor sculpture,” he says. He credits the beauty of the lake and park setting for “engaging the sculpture, artists and visitors to the fullest.”

Artists choose a spot lakeside or streamside to install their work. Some artists choose to use canopy tents to protect delicate artwork from sun and possible showers. Most pieces, however, are dotted throughout the landscape, hanging from trees or cradled into the earth, creating a magnificent sculpture-park-for-a-day.

Visitors can take a quick stroll through the park and glimpse all the competition’s entries in less than an hour. However, many choose to spend the day wandering slowly from one eye-catching sculpture to another. Although artists are limited to exhibiting three pieces, many bring photographic portfolios of their work so the public can view a fuller range.

After walking and talking, visitors can enjoy festival foods from the vendors set up at one end of the park. Many bring blankets or lawn chairs to sit back and enjoy regional musicians performing live music. More than 2,000 visitors are expected this year, and shuttles provide convenient free access from parking areas.

For Whitney Claire Brown, the Caldwell Sculpture Celebration is a family affair. Her father, Bill Brown, Jr. and grandfather, Bill Brown, Sr. both participated in the first Celebration in 1985 and she and her mother came to support them. “When I grew up and became a ceramic sculptor. I started showing alongside my father. He has since passed the torch to me. Now I bring my sculptures and he and my mother come and support me.”

Whitney calls the Sculpture Celebration a great platform for three-dimensional works of all kinds – large, small and in all media. **“The park is a magical place for that day, a perfect platform for sculpture,”** she says.

Another well-loved tradition is the “Blue Jeans Preview” party on Friday night before the event. This casual, informative evening is open to the public by reservation and includes dinner and live music. The party welcomes the participating sculptors and judge, sponsors and visitors. Many find this preview makes the following day’s sculpture event more meaningful.

Saturday’s show culminates with an awards presentation, followed by the Judge’s Walking Tour of Winners. During this popular feature, judges share what piqued their interest and why they chose the winning pieces. “Best of Show,” “The Stevens Family Foundation People’s Choice,” and other cash awards will total about \$11,000 in payment to winning artists. Boosting the economy, many works will be sold that day or later in the year as artists complete commissions through contacts made at the event.

Nathaniel Miller moved to Lenoir in 2008 from a similar-sized town in West Virginia. “There wasn’t much in the way of arts in my hometown, so I wasn’t expecting much when I arrived here. Man, I was wrong.” Miller had given up on making sculptures, but still had one of his pieces in his basement when Nancy Crawford, then affiliated with the Caldwell Arts Council, visited and recommended he enter his work. That piece won Best in Show and Miller has earned two Merit Awards since then.

“It was stunning for me. Having a place where I can show my work, well, it’s made a big difference. I do a show and that same day, I’m thinking about what to create next.” Miller says his sculptures are not your standard carved stone or wood pieces. The back end of a Cadillac is transformed into a living environment. The end of a canoe becomes a man.

He’s been part of some other transformations as well. Last year, Miller began mentoring a student and helped get him interested in art as a creative outlet. With Miller’s encouragement, 10-year-old Durant

Lipford entered his own sculpture and won a \$500 cash merit award.

Sculpture is a transformative art changing a material's form, appearance or character. In other ways, people, too, can be transformed. For your own transformative moment enter this date on your calendar: **September 12, 2015**. But be forewarned. Once you experience September's second Saturday of sculpture, you will want to be back year after year.

** The public is reminded that Lenoir has two parks with "Broyhill" in the name. The Sculpture Celebration is now held at The T.H. Broyhill Walking Park.*

COMPETITION HISTORY

The Sculpture Celebration was the brainchild of Dr. Henry Michaux, a Lenoir native and retired professor of sculpture at the University of South Carolina in Orangeburg, South Carolina, Sam Sturgis, retired long-time director of the City of Lenoir Parks and Recreation Department, and Liza Plaster, retired Caldwell Arts Council Director.

According to Liza Plaster, former director of the Caldwell Arts Council, during the '80s these visionaries wished to hold an event that would both celebrate sculpture and serve as a catalyst to get more people to enjoy the park. Also involved in the plans was Bill Brown, a Linville Falls sculptor and son of one of the early directors of the Penland School of Crafts.

The early organizers were able to achieve a successful private/public partnership; the City of Lenoir agreed to pay for overhead costs, and private money from the Broyhill Family Foundation would be used to purchase selected works.

"That was the brilliant part," says Plaster. By using private money for purchase, the event successfully avoided the kind of controversy that has plagued many other communities that have found it impossible to garner unanimous public approval of art."

Some years, just one piece was purchased for public display; other years there may be three or more purchases. In all, more than 80 pieces now grace Caldwell County, which claims to hold more sculpture per capita than anywhere else in the country.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Sculptors may register early for discounted rates, or pay the full registration fee on site. No cost for visitors!

Friday, September 11

10 a.m. – 7 p.m. – Park opens for on-site registration, site selection, and installation

7 p.m. – Blue Jeans Preview Party with dinner and live music; contact the Caldwell Arts Council at 828-754-2486 or www.caldwellarts.com for reservations

8 p.m. – Introductions, Judge's presentation and open discussion

Saturday, September 12

7 a.m. – Park opens for on-site registration and site selection

9 a.m. – Exhibition opens; judging begins for Merit Awards; live music & food vendors throughout the day

3:30 p.m. – Awards presentation, followed by Judge's walking tour of winners

4:00 p.m. – Exhibition closes

IF YOU'RE GOING

30th Annual Sculpture Celebration

Saturday, September 12, 2015

T.H. Broyhill Walking Park

945 Lakewood Circle

Lenoir, N.C. 28645

Contact Caldwell Arts Council for more information at (828) 754-2486 or www.caldwellarts.com.

Top 10 Reasons to Attend the Caldwell Arts Council Sculpture Celebration

1. Beautiful setting
2. Interesting artists
3. Friendly volunteers
4. FREE!
5. Outdoor food and music
6. Well organized event
7. Creative artwork
8. Relaxing activity for all ages and abilities
9. Make personal and professional connections
10. It's the 30th Year! Time to see what you've been missing out on!

- Candace Tippet, Granite Falls, NC
note: may want to use words in bold as pulled quotes in story.

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