



ARTS

A tree grows on Willy Street, one metal petal at a time



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A tree is growing in the most unlikely of places.

In a garagelike workshop on the south side of Madison, sparks fly and the smell of melting metal fills the air. This is where, over the next year, a grand sculpture to greet eastbound visitors to the Williamson-Marquette neighborhood will take shape.

"It's an aesthetic adventure," said Erika Koivunen, a metal sculptor known for

making butterflies and birds out of nails, spikes and silverware.

A former student of [Dr. Evermor](#), Koivunen spent nine months helping craft the 32-foot birds that stand in front of a Paterson Street office building. She made the [Midvale Garden Gates](#), a flock of [birds on the bike path](#), and both interior and exterior pieces for [two Madison Barriques](#).

This new piece, called the Williamson Street Gateway Sculpture, is set to be 32 feet tall and 18 feet in the canopy (Koivunen marked the measurements in black lines on the floor of her studio). The flowers for its branches are a foot in diameter.

Planning began in fall 2011. After six months of road construction, the [Marquette Neighborhood Association](#) (which is partly responsible for putting [poetry in the sidewalks](#) and a bold [Pamela Castro](#) mural on the side of the Willy Street Co-op) wanted something new to introduce visitors to Willy Street.

"Studies show that putting sculptures in medians have been traffic calming," Koivunen said.

She eventually got approval for her tree from both the neighborhood and the city. Koivunen estimates the sculpture, crafted from reclaimed and donated metal, will take \$40,000 and a year to complete. About half of the money has been raised, including \$15,000 from the Neighborhood Association and \$12,600 from the City of Madison. The MNA is [still accepting donations](#).

Koivunen hopes to install the tree by spring of 2014. The location is the 600 block of Williamson, near Machinery Row.

Meanwhile, Koivunen is getting the community involved. Friends like [Madison artist Cheryl DeWelt](#) have been coming by the past few Tuesdays for a kind of "welding happy hour" that is open to the public (now without the happy hour part).

"Being in a shop is fun. Some people are drawn to it," said DeWelt, lifting her protective mask. "We take metal and cut it and turn it into different things ... it's just exciting and fun."

Mrill Ingram, who lives in the Willy Street neighborhood, wielded a large rubber hammer at a recent Tuesday night workshop. She has only tried welding once, but she's fascinated by metal art.

"The opportunity to participate and not just look at it is fun," Ingram said. A professional welding certification at Madison College (MATC) was too expensive, and she's not interested in jewelry, so Koivunen's tree workshops were the perfect fit.

"I didn't draw any conclusions," she said. "It's about helping the sculpture ... if I get to do some welding, it's great."

Ingram had plenty to do, hammering clutch plates and matching them up for flower petals. There is plenty of sorting to be done as well. Koivunen hopes people will donate metal from their garages, like old shovels and rake heads, some of which could go into the tree's trunk.

"Erika's great about being inclusive, and inviting anybody to help and learn and do things," DeWelt said. "She pretty much just tells you what you need to know."

"If you don't know how to weld, you can still come and find something to do, talk to the artists. ... Sometimes you have to see lots of good ideas, and then you start to get (ideas of) your own."

HELP A TREE GROW

Want to help make the Williamson Street Gateway Sculpture?

- **Work as a welder** — Tuesdays through Feb. 26, 6-9 p.m., 1804 S. Park St. (overhead door #4, turn by All Metals)
- **Hammer and sort** — during the same times, non-welders can help sort metal pieces and hammer plates into shape
- **Donate metal** — Cleaning out your garage? Koivunen will accept donations of shovel and rake heads, and much more; most anything a magnet sticks to, she'll take
- **Donate money** [via PayPal](#) or by mail to: Marquette Neighborhood Association, PO Box 3223, Madison, WI 53704
Ref: [Public Art - Gateway Sculpture](#)