

THE DAILY REPORTER

Wisconsin's Construction, Law and Public Record Authority Since 1897

City selects State Street art

Madison's badger statue would be tribute to state

Paul Snyder , paul.snyder@dailyreporter.com

August 19, 2008

Madison selected a group of artists to create the water feature for the Frances Plaza on State Street, but no one can guarantee the estimated \$230,000 piece of artwork always will be admired.

"Look, football Saturdays, you got a 3-feet high by 4-feet wide sculpture with water running through it," said Kelly Meuer, owner of State Street Brats. "You know there are going to be kids that have fun with that."

The sculpture of badgers near water, designed by Minneapolis-based Mykle-bust + Sears and to be called "Four Lakes," could stand next to State Street Brats by the end of 2009. Both city officials and the artists know it might be subject to different kinds of "christenings," but say they'll deal with it.

"There was a lot of discussion about it," said Karin Wolf, program administrator for the Madison Arts Commission. "Are kids going to skateboard on it? Urinate on it? Sleep on it? Throw trash in it? This is a really challenging project, and there still might be a million constraints that need to be further addressed."

Wolf said the city attorney is drawing up the contract for the project, which should be signed within the next month. Andrea Myklebust, one of the project's artists, said designing something to withstand both the elements of nature and the inhabitants of a major university while pleasing a wide spectrum of people is part of the fun of public projects.

"People have lots of opinions in Madison," she said. "And they're quite happy to share them ... But it's pretty similar to other (public) projects we've done. Maybe it's accentuated a little because of the high visibility of the area."

Alderman Eli Judge said the city's selection committee went with the project because it was decidedly safe.

"I was looking at some of the other ones, and thinking, 'That would make a nice jungle gym,'" he said. "We have to keep an eye on the people having good times on Thursday and Friday nights down there. I kind of feel like I'm the watchdog, but other than if it's going to be safe, I don't have further questions."

Myklebust said Wisconsin granite will be used, which should prevent destruction and graffiti, and the water will not recirculate.

That's a good thing, said Judge, who said a circulating fountain in nearby park had recently been filled with suds and was used for bathing by some homeless people.

Myklebust + Sears will continue to work with city officials to brainstorm ways to further deter what Mykelbust called "personal interaction."

"The design so far is very schematic," she said.

The project will feature a large bronze badger in addition to four large stones to represent the area's four lakes.

Meuer said the badgers should prove to be a popular addition to State Street in the coming years.

"We have a large inflatable Bucky (University of Wisconsin-Madison mascot) that we put up during football season," he said. "You wouldn't believe the amount of people that take pictures with it. People want that memory — 'that's when we were in Wisconsin for that game.'"

And while the bronze badgers and other elements of the artwork probably won't go untouched, Meuer said business leaders in the area discussed not having to shoulder blame — or the cost — when it comes to vandalism. For that, the city is responsible.

"All it takes is one article or someone to say, 'Well, it's all State Street Brats' fault,'" he said. "Yes, we sell alcohol here, but people forget that most of the drinking starts at house parties. A lot of times we just end up cleaning up the mess."

© 2008 Daily Reporter Publishing Co., All Rights Reserved.