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Art will flow throughout new WaterShed

Through glass and sunshine, the education center will help school children understand the region's water issues.

There is something about light and water. Seeing sunshine reflected on the surface of Lucky Peak Reservoir or dancing across the ripples in the Boise River draws your eye and mesmerizes and inspires the soul.

To artist Amy Westover, light and glass are watery metaphors for issues of water conservation in the Treasure Valley in a piece of public art at the Boise WaterShed Environmental Education Center, adjacent to the West Boise Wastewater Treatment Plant.

“What a perfect way to draw attention to this aspect than to create a painting that will be illuminated by sunlight,” Westover said.

She won commissions for four of the projects in the building through a public call to artists, and is one of four artists whose work at the center will fuse ideas of water conservation and environmental education with art. She designed a concrete wall, a floor that shows the flow of the Boise River, sinks and drinking fountains made from giant pipes and windows that form the nearly 40-foot long, by 15-foot tall facade of the the education center.

It is scheduled to open May 15, but the windows will be installed in early August because of construction delays. The window project will become a project for another Idaho artist.

Karen Bubb is the interim executive director, and public arts manager for the Boise City Arts Commission, soon to be the Department of Arts and History. She also is an artist.

Bubb works in several mediums, but she finds her deepest expression in the public experience of art, she said. To that end, Bubb plans to chronicle Westover's progress creating the windows by following her to Frankfurt, Germany, where Westover will work with glass experts at Derix GlasStudio.

“I want to engage people in the making of this piece of public art. It's about sharing the creative process with people,” Bubb said.

That is something Bubb learned in 2004 when an opportunity to travel to China with a cultural delegation came her way.

'SHARES' IN ART

She wrote a grant to pay for the trip, as she did for this one, but it wasn't enough. So, she sold public “shares.” For \$32, a donor received a postcard mailed from China and an original artwork based on her Chinese experience. Bubb sold enough shares to pay for the difference in the cost of the trip and to buy a digital camera and recorder for the project. But it took her nearly three years to complete all of the art. Then the project culminated in a presentation at Stewart Gallery.

In reflection, it was the ability to connect people in Boise to art in a new way that “became the most satisfying part of the process,” Bubb said. So, she again is selling shares in a trip, although it is a streamlined project.

People can buy shares for \$40 each, which gets them a “creatively purchased” postcard mailed from Frankfurt and a

limited edition flip book filled with imagery documenting the window's construction. It also includes invitations to several presentations she and Westover will give about the experience.

Bubb and Westover have worked together as artist and project manager since Westover's first public art commission, Grove Street Illuminated, in 2001. Both women received grants from the Idaho Commission on the Arts Quick Arts Fund for their trips. No public dollars will be spent, Bubb said.

In fact, because construction delays postponed her work on the windows, Westover had to write her grant three different times, actually twice returning money.

Bubb leaves for Frankfurt on March 21.

ABOUT THE GLASS

Derix is the leading glass studio in the world. Its artisans work with others from every country, helping them realize their visions in glass.

The studio houses state-of-the-art equipment and about 70 artisans, who are experts in specific glass-working techniques, such as acid etching, sandblasting, lamination and cutting, said Barbara Derix.

She is the youngest member of the family in the business and now lives in Portland, where she manages the consulting part of the business.

The company was founded in 1866 and has been a family business for five generations.

The Derix family members are known for their deft abilities with glass and their discretion as they've created some of the most beautiful windows in the world both seen and unseen.

"Glass is historically used most effectively in churches," Derix said. "We created the stained glass in the Pope's private chapel at the Vatican. It was installed by my grandfather and my father, when he was 12."

The family also has created windows in 19 Latter-day Saints temples around the world, including one in Billings, Mont.

Their artistic handprints are in two projects at the Seattle-Tacoma Airport and the windows at the Top of the Rock observation deck at Rockefeller Center in New York City. Now, they will have windows in Boise.

The design is done and the artisans have chosen the glass techniques for fabrication, Derix said. Once Westover arrives she will choose colors and work with artisans to refine the design. If the project has money left in the budget, she can make changes.

The windows will be made in Frankfurt and shipped to Boise by barge and train.

Westover based her design on infrared satellite imagery gathered by the Department of Water Resources. It shows where water is and where it isn't, and it offers insight on how differently it is used from farmland to suburbs.

What she created was a composite of the information from Lucky Peak to the Snake River.

"We're figuring out how to manage our water from these images from space," Westover said. "It's fascinating."

That synthesis fits nicely into the mission of the Boise WaterShed, which is to educate people about water conservation, said Vince Tromboli, community relations supervisor for the Department of Public Works.

“The art is an incredible piece of what we’re doing,” Tromboli said. “It will give people another perspective and a teaching tool for how to protect and preserve our water resources.”

THE BIG IDEA

The idea for the Boise WaterShed started 17 years ago as just a room in the administration building. When that building needed to be torn down, the idea blossomed into the center. The city contracted architect and public artist Dwaine Carver to formulate a plan for how public art could be integrated into the site. This is phase one of that plan.

All of the public art is made possible by the city’s “percent for art” initiative, which went into effect in March 2001. It designates that one percent of all funds for capital construction projects be designated for public art.

When the Boise WaterShed was first proposed, Public Works began consolidating its percent for art dollars in anticipation. “It doesn’t make sense to put a piece of art next to a sewer pipe,” Tromboli said, “This educational center does make sense.

It is designed to be a state-of-the-art, hands-on experiential learning center with some sophisticated exhibits that will promote understanding of water issues in the Valley.

The department is developing the curriculum.

“We’re targeting kids in fourth- through 12th grades. “This is a lesson they will take with them throughout their lives,” he said.

It is a lesson that Boise can’t do without, he said.

“We’re doing OK now, but the Valley’s population is expected to top 1 million in the next 20 years. The water supply will dwindle as the population increases.”

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