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Vibrant Sculpture Adds Dash of Flair to Valley Court Park ^[1]

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By:
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The 12-foot-high sculpture entitled "Lemon Grass," created by Holt artist Dane Porter, now stands at the entrance to Valley Court Park. (Photos by Raymond Holt)

The unveiling of the City of East Lansing's first project funded by its "Percent for Art" program Sunday at Valley Court Park was, by most accounts, a 100 percent success. Proponents believe the initial investment to be have been very well spent.

The City commissioned Dane Porter, age 23, of Holt to construct a \$50,000 sculpture he named "Lemon Grass" because of the manner in which the blades of grass are suspended in mid-air.

"Dane is a real rising star on the Michigan art scene. I personally love how he combines metal and acrylic and shots of color and movement into his pieces," said Meegan Holland of the East Lansing Arts Commission.

Porter graduated from Lansing Christian High School and then attended Siena Heights University for a year to study art. He works from his parents' home in Holt and a studio in Dimondale. Dane Porter Art Company, where he builds and designs pieces for sale.

"We are super excited about this project because the commission has spent the past few years working our way through the Percent for Art Ordinance," Holland said.

Holland was referring to Ordinance 1339, which was passed in 2017. It mandates that developers allocate 1 percent of redevelopment project costs (capped at \$25,000) to a public art project. The developers can either choose a project to spend the money on or donate the funds to the East Lansing Arts Commission.

Ordinance 1339 [2] also requires that, each year, the City pay into the Public Art Fund "an amount equal to one percent of the cost to the City's general fund of all public facilities or city capital improvement projects unless public art is not legally permissible due to the constraints imposed by the funding mechanism."

The \$50,000 that was used to commission Lemon Grass is the first project to be completed using donated funds from the Percent for Art program.

"This is really a big deal to us and something the residents of East Lansing should be really proud of," Holland said. "It shows a real commitment to the arts, it supports artists with real money and it also shows the city knows the importance of placemaking and the inspirational elements that heighten the quality of life in our city."



Dane Porter

Sculpture's color captures the artist's spirit

The sculpture is constructed mostly of steel for the support and the blades of grass are made of aluminum that are powder coated to prevent rust and corrosion.

"The artist in me says you could have done this or that differently but I'm really happy with it," said Porter, whose work is also on display at Michigan State University Federal Credit Union's corporate headquarters, Granger Construction, Delphi Glass and First National Bank of East Lansing. "We started developing (Lemon Grass) and sketching it out probably a year ago, while the physical work started a couple of months ago.

"It's been a long process but it's been a good one. It's a piece that's really special to me; I like a lot of color. I'm so honored that they chose me I'm still humbled by the fact that I was asked to create this piece. It's really special that I cannot only have a piece of art in this park in East Lansing, but it's something people will see every day and get to enjoy."

Porter's family attended Sunday's unveiling. His mother sewed the sheets together to cover the sculpture prior to the unveiling.

"I'm really excited that he has pursued what he set out to do at a young age and is succeeding at

it,? his twin Rachel Porter said.

?The extraordinary thing about Dane is that he?s been self-employed as an artist since 2010,? Holland said. ?Making a living at art is hard, so this is an extraordinary young man. On many levels this truly a special day for East Lansing.?



A welcoming entrance to Valley Court Park

Mayor Pro Tem Erik Altmann and Councilmember Ruth Beier also attended Sunday?s unveiling.

?It's great to be here and a great day to dedicate this piece of art,? Altmann said. ?First, I want to congratulate the artist Dane Porter. I have to confess we stopped by here last night to try to get a sneak peek but they had already bundled it up. If you haven?t looked at his portfolio on the Web, I encourage you to do so. We were thinking something like this would look good in our backyard.?

Altmann noted the unique green color of the sculpture and generated laughter from the audience when he said, ?I think it?s going to look great here all the time, but I think it?s going to look especially great on those rare Michigan days that are cloudy and overcast.?

Altmann thanked the East Lansing Arts Commission, explaining that the process of choosing the artist for the project was a competitive one, and noted that the East Lansing Art Commission is comprised up of community members, not professional artists or city officials.

?They got a bunch of proposals and reviewed them all, got input from art experts and ended up making a great choice,? Altmann said.

The area that ?Lemon Grass? was placed, at the entrance of Valley Court Park, was initially designed to hold a statue called Community, but that sculpture (shown below) corroded over time and had to be removed.



"I don't think that will happen to this statue. I'm looking forward to laying eyes on it every time I come to this beautiful park and I'm also looking forward to seeing other people lay their eyes on it because I think watching people react to public art is part of the fun," Altmann said.

According to Holland, the city put out a call out for interested artists and received seven submissions. The art selection panel of the Arts Commission selected Porter's work over four other finalists.

"Looking forward to the future, we want to see that healthy mix of developers coming to us with their own ideas and also donating, and I think this is a perfect example," said Arts Commission member Lisa Biering. "This is a space that didn't have anything there and now it was this vibrant piece that is going to catch people's eyes. Our hope for the Percent for Art program is that we can look around East Lansing where we can really do some creative placemaking."

Note: After publication, this article was updated to include the image of the "Community" sculpture and to clarify that the City also contributes money to the Public Art Fund under Ordinance 1339.

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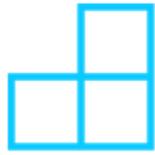
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