

Art sculpture to have new home

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New Prague's art sculpture, "Towering to Our Future," will have a new home in front of New Prague Memorial Library near the intersection of S Lincoln Avenue and E Main Street by September.

New Prague city planner Kyra Chapman said the project is being aided by a \$7,000 grant from the Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council (PLRAC), which approved the project Feb. 23 of this year. The grant is helping to rebuild, relocate, and provide virtual additions to Towering to Our Future.

Local artist, Kersten Dahl-Shekla, who orchestrated the community-built structure, is also involved in the project. Dahl-Shekla worked with 44 New Prague residents of various ages to build bas-relief plaques depicting parts of their lives and what they loved about the community. The sculptures touched on such themes as religion, family, agriculture and Czech culture. The structure was erected in Phillip's Park in 2009.

The structure was taken down in 2022 due to deterioration of the tower. Shortly after it was taken down, employees at Chart Industries volunteered their time, effort and skills to rebuild the tower and sealcoat the entire sculpture.

Dahl-Shekla said someone had asked about moving Towering to Our Future near the library as they thought it got



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lost at Phillip's Park. She added Chapman had been helpful in contacting Chart Industries, with the business' CFO Joe Brinkman approving the work. The new tower is made of stainless steel and was painted.

"Last year in June, I started grant research with Kersten," said Chapman, adding they are also getting other local help.

"The New Prague Area Arts Council donated money for gold leaf for the sculptures," said Dahl-Shekla. She will be applying the gold leaf for the 44 smaller sculptures and reestablishing the backing of each of the plaques.

When Towering to Our Future is installed near the library, the tower will have plaques by different age groups. There will be 11 bas-relief bronze plaques on each side. There will be young children (ages 3 to third grade) on the eastern side, teenagers on the southern side, adults on the western, and elders on the northern side. There will also be a sign introducing the sculpture and providing a QR code, which will direct people to a website featuring each of the plaques. The site will also have YouTube videos of the artistic

process of constructing the sculpture.

"I'm going to be busy looking for someone who knows how to do websites," said Dahl-Shekla.

A grand opening of the structure will happen during Dozinky, New Prague's Czech festival. The sculpture will be unveiled after the Car Cruise Friday, Sept. 15. Dahl-Shekla will be at the sculpture that night and Saturday, Sept. 16, encouraging people to make their own narrative. People can write on adhesive notes what they love about their life or their community and place it on a board. Any of the original artists who helped bring the bas-relief plaques to life are welcome to attend. During the grand opening for Towering to Our Future, brochures and pamphlets will be available listing other artistic events or activities in the community. Dahl-Shekla said she is enjoying the process. "Art has always been about bringing people together," she said.

This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.