

"t riffids" (far left) by ray faunce, outside the Wedgwood inn on West Bridge Street; "the Listening Bench" (left) by Jim Gallucci, outside the Bucks County Children's Museum in Union Square; "florence Chair" (below) by James Vilona, near the Bridge Street entrance to Union Square



Sounds like a Sculptural summer

New Hope's storied outdoor sculpture exhibit gets a boost from a regional supporter.

By **GWEN SHRIFT**
Staff Writer

Among the newest highly visible works of art in New Hope is "The Listening Bench," an inviting, interactive sculpture at the Bucks County Children's Museum in Union Square on Bridge Street.

Jim Gallucci, a sculptor from Greensboro, North Carolina, twines speaking tubes through a circular bench and tops them with sound-amplifying structures resembling morning glory blossoms crossed with speakers from old-fashioned Victrola phonographs.

According to Gallucci's website, wind whistles through the speaking tubes when people aren't whispering into them.

"The Listening Bench" broadcasts the start of a new phase for New Hope's celebrated public art tradition. Under a grant from the PNC Arts Alive program, a collection of sculptures around the borough will be expanded by at least seven works through the spring of 2016.

The exhibit, on long-term view, is being renamed the PNC Arts Alive Outdoor Sculpture Project.

The original outdoor show was started in 2003 by the late Robin Larsen as an ongoing program of the New Hope Arts Center, which she founded.

Over the years, more than 60 works have been on view at various times. The exhibit has been recognized nationally as a top small-town art destination.

The funding climate was warmer in those days. In more recent years, the arts center has relied on private donations. Money for the new works comes from the PNC Foundation, which included New Hope in a new round of grants to 22 organizations in the Philadelphia and southern New Jersey region.

According to a press release from PNC: "Recipients were selected for bold thinking around increasing arts access and engagement."

Several other works on view have settled into the landscape, such as Carl Billingsley's "Light Sieve" on Stockton Avenue between Ferry and Bridge

streets. The work filters sun through mystical-looking perforations; in some ways, it's a meteorological complement to "The Listening Bench."

Longtime visitors to the Union Square entrance at Hardy Bush Way and Route 202 are familiar with "Large Granite Arch," a deconstructed monumental sculpture by Harry Gordon. This one shares a certain antediluvian spirit with "Boomer," Dana Stewart's enormous dinosaur-like creature perched on a bank of the Delaware Canal on South Main Street.

Other works are dramatic, such as Wendy Klemperer's "Gericoroix," a sinewy equine form at 275 W. Bridge St., or surrealistically fanciful, such as "Triffids," Ray Faunce's scary bouquet of science-fiction flowers outside the Wedgwood Inn on West Bridge Street.

Matthew Merwin and Christoph Spath offer works in monolithic style, Merwin with "Illum" on North Main Street and Spath with "Labyrinth" at the New Hope Historical Society, South Main and Ferry streets.

Just outside the arts center, Justin Long's "Warrior" stands sentinel. James Vilona draws up the suave "Florence Chair" near the Bridge Street entrance to Union Square — and tempting as it may look as seating, weary tourists are better advised to keep a respectful distance.

The arts center plans an official opening for the expanded exhibit on the Fourth of July weekend, but there's nothing to stop art lovers to view the works before then. A map of sculpture sites is available at www.sculptureproject.org. Gwen Shrift is a feature writer at Calkins Media. Phone: 215-949-4204. email: shrift@calkins.com.



"Boomer," monumental bronze by Dana Stewart, on the Delaware Canal bank on South Main Street