

ART ALUM SCULPTS MEMORIES INTO MEMORIAL TRIBUTE

Sculptor Mark DeGraffenried developed a passion for art at an early age. Today, that passion is easily seen and is translated directly into a recent project — a memorial sculpture that honors eight Utah State University agriculture students and their professor who died in a tragic van accident in 2005.

DeGraffenried, a 1993 USU art graduate, is working in a collaborative effort with Monument Arts of Sandy, Utah, to create the commissioned tribute to the accident victims.

The memorial is composed of black granite, bronze and steel. DeGraffenried is first sculpting clay panels that will be cast in bronze. These nine panels, 3 feet by 3 feet, represent an agricultural interest of each of the nine men. Two half-circles, above and below the panels, include the men's names. At the lower left of the installation is a bronze rubbing element that allows visitors to make a paper rubbing as a personal memento of the memorial.

To create the panels, DeGraffenried set up a temporary studio on the USU campus in the Chase Fine Arts Center/Fine Arts Visual sculpture area. It's there, working on the panels, that DeGraffenried's passion shines brightly. Whether working alone or sharing the experience with the accident victims' families, he brings an intimate, human touch to the work.

"These panels not only represent the students and their teacher, they also represent the people whose lives were changed so drastically," he said. "I want the panels to be visually stimulating, but they are also tributes to the accident victims and a tribute to agriculture."

DeGraffenried has a private studio in Clarkston, Utah, and works fulltime as an artist.

"As a resident of Cache Valley and a USU graduate, it is a great honor to sculpt this monument," he said. "I hope those affected by the loss will receive comfort and inspiration from this memorial."

The artist brings a human touch and connection to his work in several ways. He wanted his studio space open to all — he encouraged visitors to

About the USU Memorial:

- Artist Dan Cummings, owner of Spectrum Studio, Salt Lake City, will create the granite elements.
- Chief designer for Monument Arts Perry Van Schelt designed the memorial.
- Mark DeGraffenried sculpted the bronze elements.
- The memorial project received financial support from alumni and friends, the Utah Farm Bureau, USU student government, USU Student Services, departments in the College of Agriculture, the Agriculture Experiment Station and others.



Mark DeGraffenried, a USU alum, works on a clay panel prior to casting in bronze for the memorial.



Artist Mark DeGraffenried has worked on a number of impressive projects. Among his favorites are:

- 2008 “Marriner S. Eccles” commissioned by Utah State Capitol Preservation Board and Mariner S. Eccles Commission to sculpt an 8’ bronze statue for the Utah State Capitol and a 6’ statue for the Federal Reserve Building in Washington, D.C.
- 1994 “Sea Farer” life-size bronze memorial to those who lost lives at sea, Homer, Ala.
- 2001 “The Crossing” commission awarded by Seatrek Foundation. Four, life-size emigrant families (each family includes a mother, father and two children), cast in bronze to commemorate Utah’s pioneer heritage from Europe. Permanent locations at Mersey Side Dock Maritime Museum, Liverpool, England; Broad Street, Portsmouth, England; and Albert Dock, Hull, England. One life-size bronze on loan at Utah Cultural Celebration Center; Salt Lake City, Utah. The artist sculpted each piece and assisted with the bronze casting and installation of the finished sculptures.

stop at the lab and participate in the creative process to offer feedback about the sculpture and the students and professor it honors.

“I spent a great deal of time as a student in this very lab,” DeGraffenried said. “Because USU students provided the initial request for the memorial, I welcome having an open studio that is accessible to them.”

DeGraffenried also opened his studio and his heart to the families of those being memorialized. He felt it important to not only listen to feedback from family members, but to allow them to contribute — actually touch and carve areas in the clay panels before they were cast.

In a story for KSL television in Salt Lake City, arts reporter Carol Mikita met with the sculptor and family members of the victims.

“Each tear and each stroke of the sculptor’s tool helps Merlynn Gunnell remember her son Justin,” Mikita reported.

“His favorite saying was, ‘plow to the end of the furrow,’ Gunnell told Mikita. “He loved what he did ... I feel it such an honor to be his mom.”

A plowed furrow was incorporated into the panel memorializing Justin, and that’s a personal touch the artist appreciates.

“I want the families to be happy,” DeGraffenried said. “That is why I can re-work and adjust, even let them add a personal touch. This is a memorial to their loved ones.”

When complete, the memorial will find a temporary home in the Taggart Student Center, where it will be unveiled in fall 2008. When the planned College of Agriculture research and teaching building is

completed on the USU campus, the memorial will be permanently located in the building’s foyer.

“We are pleased to recognize these students and their professor who were such vital parts of our college,” said Noelle E. Cockett, vice president and dean for USU Extension and Agriculture.

“In the end, this monument will be an incredibly fitting part of our new agriculture building.”

The memorial commemorates the lives of Steven D. Bair, 22, Moses Lake, Wash.; Dusty Dean Fuhrman, 22, Tremonton, Utah; Justin W. Gunnell, 24, Wellsville, Utah; Justin Huggins, 22, Bear River City, Utah; Jonathan Dennis Jorgensen, 22, Peoa, Utah; Curt A. Madsen, 23, Payson, Utah; Ryan Wayne McEntire, 22, West Point, Utah; Bradley G. Wilcox, 26, Salt Lake City, Utah; and instructor Evan Parel Parker, 45, Hooper, Utah. All of the students were studying in the College of Agriculture.

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