

Getting Acquainted

David Heatwole: Man With A Mission

By Claire Stuart

Artist David Heatwole has a mission, and he dreams big. He believes that art has the power to unite people and change the world, and he has worked most of his life to promote this dream.

Heatwole recently burst into national news for setting a toilet on a pedestal in downtown Martinsburg. He readily admits that it was a publicity stunt, but not for himself. Controversy had broken out over the city's planned statue of its founder, when nobody knew what the man looked like, and the statue's pedestal stands empty.

Heatwole feels that the community had not been adequately involved and suggested alternatives to just another historic-figure statue. He says contemporary sculpture by area artists would mean more, and could even serve as an anchor for a growing arts community to attract visitors.

Originally from Bridgewater, Va., Heatwole grew up surrounded by art. His father, John, was a multi-media artist, writer and storyteller, nationally known for his whimsical folk-art wood carvings that graced the Christmas windows of Neiman Marcus.

Following in his father's footsteps, Heatwole says, "I was inspired by Dad's process and finished products around the house."

As a child, he was intrigued by the shapes and colors of everything around him. He admits that he was not very good in school because he was lost in his imagination. Soon he emerged as a multi-media artist in his own right. But, beyond that, he says, "My first love was looking at what other people do."

He was always driven by a need to promote the works of artists. In high school, Heatwole helped form a literary arts journal, *Splinters of the Mind*.

Some years later, he and some friends published the *Loudoun Arts Journal*, the first arts magazine for Loudoun County, Va.

After college, Heatwole worked as a technical illustrator for Navy contractors, drawing radio equipment, insides of submarines, and mechanical devices. Although the money was good, Heatwole found the work stifling. He left and took various jobs, spending time on his own art and meeting other artists.

He and a friend formed the Transcendental Arts Council (TAC), working on community art events, dreaming of transforming entire towns with the power of art. They found discarded doors and gave them to artists in their group to paint for an Easter egg hunt in a park. They painted pumpkins for a festival to benefit Children's Hospital.

"Umbrella Offering" was put together at Heatwole's old high school to promote tolerance and appreciation for the differences among people. Each student made a self-portrait using an umbrella, an item of their clothing, and items hung from each umbrella rib to express who they were. The umbrellas were mounted on poles in a fish shape visible from the air.

"Flowering of a Dream" was a huge flower-shaped maze in Loudoun County, made of bed sheets suspended from PCV pipe. Grade-school children drew pictures on the themes of peace, charity, and love, and wrote about them. High school students viewed the pictures, and each one wrote to a grade-schooler, telling why they liked the picture. Finally, the younger children were bussed to the high school to work with their partners and re-create the pictures on the sheets.

Says Heatwole, "I always had big visions about the possibilities art has for bringing people

together—uniting communities with one work of art."

For the Frederick County, Md., Festival of the Arts, TAC invited people from all walks of life to create art with the theme "Aspire to Greatness" on fabric panels in the "Art In-Spire Maze." It extended over two acres, shaped like a church spire, the festival's logo.

Heatwole and his family moved to Martinsburg, where he went to work for Pulmonary Associates, suppliers for home medical equipment for hospice patients. He involved himself in the arts community, including Berkeley Arts Council, Art Berkeley, and the studio tour, and continued his big art ideas.

In 2009, to promote recycling, he created a mural on a Martinsburg building—a likeness of Vincent van Gogh made of thousands of plastic bottle caps collected by individuals and organizations. This inspired a local school to create its own bottle cap murals.

This year, he unveiled his Spring Fling mural as part of American Cancer Society's Relay for Life activities.

For several years, Heatwole published a regional arts mag-

azine, *The Main ARtery*. It has not been printed recently, but he says, "It's not dead—it's just resting!"

Other things took priority in his life, including a child recovering from a liver transplant and a trip to Russia to adopt another. Heatwole and his wife, Dawn, added onto their house and have adopted five children. Nominated by Senator Jay Rockefeller, they were honored in Washington, D.C. as West Virginia Angels in Adoption. Heatwole also volunteers as a Court Appointed Child Advocate (CASA) for abused and neglected children.

Heatwole still has big ideas. "If I can see it in my head, I think it's worth pursuing," he says.

He envisions international arts ambassadors. "Each state with its own arts ambassador—to know everyone creative in the state, to identify problems in the community, and use arts to solve problems collaboratively. It may not solve problems, but it can bring them into focus."

Learn more at: <http://david-heatwole.wordpress.com>.

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