



Eureka Sculptor Bob Emser is shown in his Eureka studio about to assemble the sculpture that will be located at the southwest corner of U.S. Route 24 and Ill. Rt. 117.
Photo by Jerry McDowell.

EMSER SCULPTURE COMING HOME

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by Jerry McDowell

Landing at Rts. 24 and 117

EUREKA – The Courthouse Square intersection at U.S. Rt. 24 and Illinois Rt. 117 may soon become the permanent home of a sculpture by Bob Emser.

If they can raise an additional \$3,000 to \$5,000, Dawn Maloney and Laura Cisco will be breathing a sigh of relief that the long awaited project will come to fruition by the end of the summer.

That will mean they've reached the bargain price of \$20,000 for the sculpture Sky Trail II to make its permanent home the southwest corner of the intersection.

Emser, 59, is an international sculptor, having shown in five continents, eight countries and 27 states in the U.S. Before returning to Eureka last fall, Sky Trail II spent more than a year each in Sidney and Perth, Australia, and was exhibited at shows in Chicago Merchandise Mart, and Krasl Arts Center, St. Joseph, Mich.

Former Eureka City Councilman Zack Sancken contacted Emser about exhibiting a statue in the

city when Sancken was economic development chairman. Sancken then contacted Cisco and Maloney, who arranged for an open house at Emser's studio in Eureka.

"We were a little more ambitious on the size of the sculpture at that point," Cisco said. "And then this piece became available, and I said this piece would fit out there very nice as opposed to something brand new."

The former Eureka Mayor added, "Plus I always liked that the best. So it would work out very well. We've been working diligently trying to get some fundraising, and we think we've been making good progress. We just hope there's some public interest in helping us finish it up. Get it done."

Maloney, a vice president at Eureka Community Bank, also is a well-known local water color artist and art teacher.

“Emser supports the local economy in creating his sculptures,” she said.

“Dean Schertz of Eureka Automotive does his painting for him, Premier Fabrication in Congerville does his metal fabrication, and Cox Transfer has done moving of pieces for him.”

Emser said he uses stainless steel because it can withstand a lot of abuse and copper-colored paint finishes can withstand dramatic changes in temperature. The circular top of the sculpture is about six feet across and with the stand it stands about 12 feet tall.

The city will provide a concrete pedestal for it to stand on. Corporate or individual sponsors with large donations will have their names engraved on pavers at the base of the sculpture.

Cisco and Maloney both hope there are art lovers in the community who will push the project over the top financially in supporting a local artist.

Emser’s extensive body of work dates back to 1978 and can be seen in cities, municipalities, sculpture parks, museums and institutions of higher learning. During his 30-plus year career he has served as a visiting artist and has taught at several universities, held a tenured professorship, and founded a not-for-profit art center that is still in existence. He has also served as the executive director of Chicago’s international sculpture exhibition, Pier Walk.

He is the founding president of Chicago Sculpture International, the local affiliate of International Sculpture Center, on whose Board of Directors he has served. Emser focuses his full-time efforts creating sculptures for public and private spaces. He and his wife Dina live in Eureka. Dina is an executive leadership consultant and last week was giving the keynote address at a conference in California.

Emser left his position as associate professor at Eureka College in 1995 to open Contemporary Art Center in Peoria with Preston Jackson.

Jeff McSweeney, current economic development chair for the city, was enthusiastic about the project.

“We love it, supporting local artists, great piece of art,” he said. “What we’re talking about now is providing the foundation for it – digging it, Bob has to provide those specs about where it goes, weight wise, how far we have to dig and concrete and all that.”

There also are a Sky Trail I, in Park Ridge and Sky Trail III in Olympia Fields. Emser credits his aesthetic inspiration with his interest in model airplanes as a youth. “The curved steel within the circle of Sky Trail I mirror the crisscrossing patterns of jet streams on the flight path to O’Hare Airport in Chicago,” Emser said.

Emser is now working on a project for the East Peoria Civic Plaza that at 35 feet tall could double as a band shelter. He has done a computer mock-up and it will be built by Premier Fabrication in Congerville.

Donations may be mailed to Sculpture Fund, Eureka City Hall, 128 N. Main St., Eureka, IL 61530.