

Neighborhood artist still rocks with creative sculpture

By Margo Tiedt, Eastside News

Several years ago Eastside News featured neighborhood artist Deb Vandembroucke as she was finishing up a large sculpture (May/June, 2000). She is still going strong, and is currently finishing up yet another large sculpture.

Colorado residents Karen Combs and Stephen Boelter commissioned Vandembroucke to create a marble sculpture for their new home in Boulder Junction. Both Combs and Boelter have ties to the Madison area.

The stone is from the Yule Quarry in Marble, CO. Combs and Boelter purchased the 250-pound stone in Colorado and drove it to Madison. In October, Vandembroucke will drive the finished piece back to Colorado. The sculpture is created from white marble, with green and gold streaks – the same material used in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

The sculpture is abstract, but resembles a person wrapped in cloth. It was given its title, "Yuletto," by Combs – named, in

part, for the quarry and in honor of the artist Christo, who is known for wrapping places and things in cloth (most recently, Central Park in New York City).

Vandembroucke's Milwaukee and Waubesa Street neighbors have had the pleasure of watching the progress of this sculpture. She has been working on it for three years in her indoor/outdoor workspace attached to her garage. "For the most part, I have been working on the sculpture in the summer months. I had the garage designed just for this purpose," Vandembroucke said. She rolls her work from the garage to an outdoor patio on a big wooden cart. Because people can watch her working outside, they often stop by to ask questions and talk about sculpture. Even workers involved with the Waubesa Street construction stopped by ask about her work.

Vandembroucke initially started sculpting when she was required to find humanities credits to fit her class schedule as an undergrad (in addition to art, she studied non-Euclidian geometry and other abstract math!). She then studied sculpture at Eureka College, Bradley University and at the University of Chicago, receiving her MFA in sculpture from the University of Chicago.

While the large stone sculptures such as Yuletto may draw neighbors' attention, Vandembroucke also creates smaller pieces from both stone and wood. Most of her sculpture work is by commission (see www.debwork.com/sculpture). Her other artwork includes collages, mixed media and installation pieces. She also designs websites (in addition to her health care consultant day job).

Although her sculptures are abstract



Neighborhood artist Deb Vandembroucke with her recently finished sculpture "Yuletto." Neighbors have been able to watch the process as she worked in her outdoor workspace during the past three years.

they all have a common theme: "living in our bodies and having emotions." Each piece she creates has "a strong presence and carries a lifelike quality that looks like it is (or has once been) alive."

After finishing Yuletto, Vandembroucke plans to continue to work on smaller sculpture pieces, working with softer stone such as more marble,

Although she doesn't currently have work for sale at any galleries, she is planning for a future show of her collage work. "I do humorous collage work sort of as an antidote to sculpting because the results come more quickly," she said.

To stay motivated for the several years it takes to create her larger sculptures, she relies on a routine – working on the computer in the morning and sculpting in the afternoon. "I treat it as a job," she said. Vandembroucke also said that she isn't able to work on her artwork 365 days a year because she travels for her day job, but always looks forward to getting back to her routine: "I'm always happy to get back to my balanced day," she said.

For each of her larger sculptures, Vandembroucke plans a bon voyage event as an official send-off. She invites neighbors, artists and the curious to stop by to see the finished piece. If you missed the Yuletto bon voyage event earlier this month, but would like to see the sculpture before she delivers it to Colorado in early October, please email info@debwork.com or call 469-6410 for an appointment. ■