



## Peace by piece: Public art at Fargo park brings cultures together

By [Chelsey Engelhard / The Arts Partnership](#) Today at 7:31 a.m.



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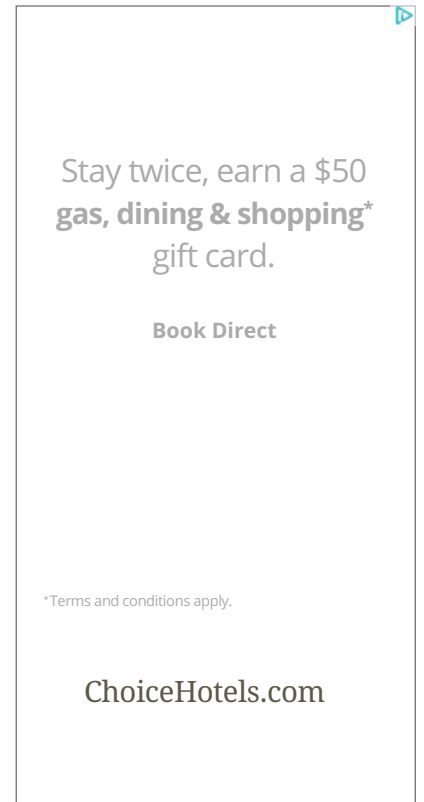


Brick sculptures and mosaics are two different types of art, but they have one major thing in common: they're made up of pieces in all shapes and sizes that contribute to the whole.

This is the analogy organizers pursued when choosing what public art installations would best represent the community at the Madison Skate and Bike Park in north Fargo.

The park, located west of Madison Elementary School, is a collaboration of Legacy Children's Foundation, Fargo Park District, Fargo Public Schools and other community organizers intended to provide a safe, positive environment for area children to play.

Art installations at the park include a lizard-shaped brick sculpture, a whimsical arch entrance and a wall mosaic crafted by area children and families that incorporates their multicultural backgrounds.



Mary Jean Dehne, the director of Legacy Children's Foundation, is the visionary behind the park.

After the Fargo Arts and Culture Commission approved partial funding for the project last year, Dehne began recruiting sponsors and community organizers to make the park a reality.

One of those recruits was ceramicist and MSUM professor Brad Bachmeier.

"(Dehne) always saw how art can help troubled and at risk kids. She knew it could reach them in a certain way," Bachmeier says. "I think that's why she felt this park needed art. Without it, it'd be a slab of concrete that kids could play on but this will connect it to the community in an authentic way."

Bachmeier, who is one of 19 brick sculptors in the United States, led the design of the lizard-shaped brick sculpture and archway — but not before doing his homework.

"I got in contact with the families to interview the parents and the kids, and they showed me the neighborhood," Bachmeier says. "We took all of their cultural symbols and put them into the work."

Families Bachmeier worked with represent Bosnian, Ethiopian, Haitian, Kenyan, Liberian, Native American and Sudanese cultures, to name a few.

Bachmeier and brick mason Paul Sperial worked with the children in spring 2016 to sculpt each of the 5,000 bricks that make up the 30-foot-long lizard sculpture.

"There are people from all over the world living in the neighborhood, so they chose an animal that can be found on all continents and that every kid can relate to — but also something low that children can climb on," Bachmeier says.

While the bricks were wet, Bachmeier and Sperial put the sculpture together then took it apart brick by brick, carefully marking each with a color and digit code.

The bricks were fired at Hebron Brick last winter.

Now, Bachmeier and Sperl are tasked with putting the artwork back together again before the park unveiling Aug. 16 — a process that Bachmeier described as "a giant puzzle."



*Brick sculptor Brad Bachmeier (left) and brick mason Paul Sperl (right) begin installation of the lizard sculpture.*

The process was similar for the whimsical brick archway that will serve as the park entrance, which includes a 10-foot- long wall mosaic that represents all the languages spoken at Madison Elementary School.

Mosaic artist Magda Szeitz and Madison Elementary art teacher Megan Johnson worked together to find the symbols of each culture to include in the mural.

Szeitz and Johnson let each child design a square from recycled stained glass and blended them together in one cohesive design.

Szeitz is currently getting the mural ready for installation, and she hopes there will be more opportunities for members of the community to contribute to completing the mosaic

before Madison Park's grand opening.

"I think participation in this project is important, even if you're only putting one tile down," Szeitz says.

Bachmeier agrees. "It's awesome how many kids got to be involved. I think a big part of this project was creating a sense of ownership and reflecting the cultures present in the community."

The Madison Skate and Bike Park's grand opening is at 1 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 16 at 1040 29th Street North in Fargo. All are welcome to celebrate.

For more information on the Legacy Children's Foundation, visit [legacychildrensfoundation.com](http://www.legacychildrensfoundation.com/) (<http://www.legacychildrensfoundation.com/>) .

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