

## Roahens commission sculpture for Fort bike trail

By Ryan Whisner, Union regional editor | Posted: Monday, January 27, 2014 9:10 am

As a thank-you to the City of Fort Atkinson and Jefferson County's continued support of bicycling, the Roahen family has contributed a sculpture for the Glacial River Trail.

Titled "Ride like the Wind," the sculpture located at the end of Farmco Lane in Fort Atkinson where the county and city portions of the trail meet, depicts the late Marcie Roahen riding like the wind down the trail, as she often did.

It was designed by Fort Atkinson native and metal sculpture artist Brady Lueck.

Marcie Roahen died on Sunday, Oct. 21, 2012, 11 months after being diagnosed with gallbladder cancer.

Born in Watertown, the former Marcie Wood lived in Fort Atkinson her entire life, 42 of those years with her husband, David "Fud" Roahen. The couple raised two daughters, Sara and Stephanie.

Her obituary stated that Marcie, 62, sometimes seemed to live as if life were a race.

"Cancer took her life, but never touched her spirit," David said.

He pointed out that "ride like the wind" was one of her favorite sayings.

Before her death, the Roahen family decided to put something along the Glacial River Trail. David noted that Marcie was adamant that she didn't want anything that was "in memory" of her.

Rather than a memorial, the family collectively donated the piece of art for the trail.

While the Glacial River Trail extends through Jefferson County from the Rock County border to Dodge County, the section that passes through Fort Atkinson has taken on its own life as a cultural and artistic venue.

A variety of sculptures depicting children are featured along the trail and there is a memorial kiosk in Lions Park recognizing the 1976 journey of Erwin "Gus" Klatt and Pat Abendroth as they drove Wisconsin's entry in the Bicentennial Wagon Train that converged at Valley Forge, Penn., on Independence Day 1976.

"Ride like the Wind" is the latest addition to these pieces, bookending the Fort Atkinson trail with sculptures by Lueck.

“We think it’s fantastic that the Roahen family decided to place this beautiful work of art on the Glacial River Trail,” Jefferson County Parks Department director Joe Nehmer said.

Based on its placement, Nehmer, a longtime friend of the Roahens, asked whether David would be OK with making the piece the actual sign for the trail. Previously, a wooden sign identifying the Glacial River Trail had been in the vicinity.

“It’s magical; it really is,” Nehmer said of the sculpture, which features the trail name on its base. “Art really helps to tell the story.”

Six different locations were provided by the Jefferson County and City of Fort Atkinson officials. Everyone involved, including Nehmer, Lueck and assistant city engineer Rudy Bushcott, had a personal connection to the Roahen family.

Ultimately, Marcie selected the final site at the end of Farmco Lane on Fort Atkinson’s south side.

The location had special meaning for Marcie as it was where she used to meet her friend, Jeannie Adams, regularly to go on rides, runs and training for a triathlon.

Marcie rode hundreds of thousands of miles with Adams.

“We had route after route,” Adams said. “There isn’t one millimeter of country road that doesn’t remind me of her.”

Adams lives near St. Joseph’s Catholic School and the Roahens reside on the other side of Fort Atkinson.

“The year we trained for a triathlon, we would meet here and ride out to Vickerman Road and points beyond and then come back, lock up the bikes and run down the trail,” she said.

Adams recalled that she had a light on her bike and when it was really early in the morning, Marcie could see her coming bumping down Hackbarth Road.

“This was actually our meeting- and parting-ways point very often,” she said of the site. “She picked the place and asked me if I would be OK that it was here and, of course, I’m honored it is here. It is just exquisite.”

According to David, Marcie was most at peace on her bike. He said riding 50 miles was a “normal” ride for her.

“That was her comfort zone,” he said. “If she could have biked every day of her life, that would have been just fine with her.”

For the sculpture itself, David went to Lueck, who had been in his daughter, Sarah’s, 1989 Fort Atkinson High School class.

A Fort Atkinson native, Lueck, who now lives in Burlington, is recognized for other local pieces along the Glacial River Trail.

Nine years ago, he was commissioned to complete the archway near the municipal parking lot off West Sherman Avenue. Lueck has created projects for buyers across the state and the region, in a vast range of sizes and a price range from \$500 to \$40,000, but pure serendipity led to the first commission in his hometown.

Lueck's mother, Betty, had retired a few years prior as high school attendance secretary and was working short-term in the Fort Atkinson city offices when she learned the Parks and Recreation Department was looking for metal artist to create an archway near the trailhead.

When approached about the archway, Lueck said he wanted to be able to give something back to the community in which he grew up and this offered a great opportunity to do that.

The archway has become the focal point of the trail, which within the city limits runs 2.2 miles along the abandoned railroad bed from just north of Madison Avenue to Farmco Lane on the city's south side.

Lueck has described the archway as being more structural than artistic, but it has elements of art with the welded archway depicting a bicycle in some grasses. He still credits his junior high school art teacher, Roy Purdy, and his high school art teacher, Bob Hase, with giving him a solid base in the fundamentals of art.

Lueck said he was inspired to be a sculptural steel artist while living in Thailand and working for a company that sold equipment and set up technical colleges in the developing world. Overseeing the installation of equipment on a site, Lueck was exposed to state-of-the-art welding lab. Inspired by the techniques used there, he decided he would like to put those techniques to use in his art.

"I didn't start making metal art right way," he said. "Instead, I invested the time and got the training."

His work is both contemporary and representational. If you stood two of his pieces next to each other, he said you wouldn't necessarily know the same person made both.

That diversity is evident even in his work along the Glacial River Trail.

In addition to the trailhead arch, Lueck also was commissioned for a memorial recognizing Don Bakker, one of the founders of the Tour de Fort bicycle club and for whom the Tour de Fort Don Bakker Memorial Metric Century bike ride later was named.

Bakker died in 1994 at age 58. The memorial piece shows a rider on a bicycle located near the trail's intersection with Rockwell Avenue. It is titled "Loves to Ride."

Thus, "Ride like the Wind" is Lueck's third piece on the trail.

“For me, it is just a great feeling from the start of this project because I knew his daughter and he knew my father,” Lueck said of working on “Ride like the Wind.”

He recalled a time as a youth when, dressed as a ninja, he and a friend “attacked” Roahen’s daughters one Halloween.

“It’s just been a real treat to work with him and the family,” the artist said. “To be able to be part of this project has been great.”

Lueck said Roahen came to him with the concept of what he wanted.

“Sometimes when I sit down I have a concept in my head that I can’t just download into my client’s head,” he said. “I make it, but I don’t make it without patrons. This is truly a joint venture.”

He acknowledged that budget really defines what can be accomplished.

“I pride myself on being able to fit sculpture into any budget,” he said. “My goal is to always under-promise and over-deliver. I want people to realize that art and sculpture are attainable at any price.”

After doing a drawing of the proposed sculpture, Lueck completed a maquette or a scale mode of the sculpture so he could understand how he was going to build it and so Roahen could see how it was going to look. Roahen now has that piece at home.

Lueck worked off a photo of Marcie on her bike. He also borrowed her bike and shoes to get the right size and dimensions of the silhouette.

“That is her foot size and that is her bike scaled with a little artistic license,” he said. “It is basically the dimensions of her physical bike, using that to give her connection to the project.”

In “Ride like the Wind,” Lueck sought to use more suggestive negative spaces in the sculpture. Each piece of hair flowing back from the rider was welded on individually.

“People want the muscle groups and the bone structure and the face,” he said. “This was the result of me trying to create that full-scale human figure without having to put all the details in. I don’t think its really necessary,;you really capture the spirit of a moving bicycler without having the thigh muscles and the biceps.”

Lueck acknowledged that it might be a bit contemporary for some people’s taste, but said he feels it is descriptive of what is going on at the trail.

“This is a connection to someone’s loved one,” the artist said. “I take my work really seriously. When it comes to a memorial, I’m even that more focused to make sure it’s just right.”

He said what motivates him for a piece such as the trail sign commissioned by the Roahen family is that years from now, the sculpture will remain and put a smile on someone's face.

"It will be there for other people to enjoy," Lueck said. "It's a legacy piece, Marcie's legacy as much as ours. It's one of those things where I want to tell people that I was here, too."