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From sticks, he'll weave art for Rock Hill

By Christy Mullins - cmullins@heraldonline.com

World renowned artist Patrick Dougherty cautions that when he begins his sculpture on the lawn of downtown Rock Hill's Community Performance Center next week, bystanders might be skeptical when they see his main material: a pile of sticks.

But he said as the sculpture grows, so probably will viewers' enthusiasm. Everyone, he said, has fond feelings about sticks, whether they know it or not.

"When you're a child and you pick up a stick in the woods, it could be anything, from a piece of a house to a magic wand," Dougherty said. "There's the potential to dream about what it was and how it could act. People still attain that kind of allure that sticks are something - anything."



Dougherty's tree sapling sculptures reach up to 25 feet in height and have crawled over buildings, snaked around staircases and towered over open fields.

His future installation in Rock Hill is a \$15,000 project funded by ACE Projects at Winthrop, a privately funded arts outreach program. ACE has partnered with the university, the Arts Council of York County, the Rock Hill Old Town Association and Rock Hill's Gallery Up to encourage community involvement.

Eight sculpture students at Winthrop University will work as Dougherty's assistants. Each will spend the next three weeks - including one week of spring break

- in Rock Hill helping to gather, harvest and weave tree saplings.

It's the university's first hands-on project between art students and an internationally known artist since 2006, when two Japanese artists-in-residence made wind and copper plate drawings for a month and a half on campus.

The lesson for students, says Winthrop fine arts chairman and coordinator of ACE projects Tom Stanley, is: "You have to be civically engaged if you want the arts to be successful."

Dougherty still walks through the wooded area that is his backyard and picks up sticks. He's done it since the early 1980s, and he uses many of those sticks and tree saplings as materials in his celebrated figures.

Rock Hill's own tree sapling sculpture will stand alone on the performance center lawn, close to and visible from the street. Dougherty said he'll need about half a day to determine the size and shape of his sculpture, but it won't exceed 25 feet in height and the public will be able to interact by walking inside or through it.

He'll start on the project Monday morning.

The process, Dougherty said, is like building a bird's nest.

It's not difficult to drag a stick through the woods and have it tangle, Dougherty said. In

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the same way, the tree saplings pull and weave together naturally with a sculptor's help.

Dougherty will begin by laying his ideas out in footprints on the ground. He will trace the footprints with tree saplings he collects in nearby wooded areas or in his own back yard, then dig holes in the ground where the sculpture will secure itself.

He will fill the holes with larger saplings that act as a base, then pull the saplings upward to make the shape he wants. Dougherty will firm the shape by adding layers of saplings throughout the process.

He's made more than 200 of the sculptures in the past three decades throughout the United States, Europe and Asia.

Dougherty just finished a seven-part sculpture at a private residence in California inspired by the Dogon tribe's treasure houses in Mali. The set of tree sapling houses measured 40 feet long, 35 feet wide and 25 feet tall.

When he finishes in downtown Rock Hill, Dougherty will head to Minnesota, then Washington. He builds the sapling structures in three-week work periods about 11 months out of the year.

When his project wears down and is eventually uprooted at the spot on Main Street, Dougherty will have started a legacy in Rock Hill, hopefully bringing more artists to do the same thing, Stanley said.

"He helps people understand that what he's doing is not anything that's out of the ordinary."

Christy Mullins 803-329-4062

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thepumpmann wrote on 03/09/2010 08:27:37 AM:

No MadMaxipad.....they all just hate you for being the psychotic, rambling, hunched-over cretin that you are. It has nothing to do with art or any of the other things that you mentioned.

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kyle wrote on 03/06/2010 10:56:25 PM:

Carl, please enlighten us. What is art?

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Mad_Maxentius wrote on 03/06/2010 06:58:32 PM:

Southerners are moronic: they hate their wife, they hate their girlfriend, they hate their mistress, they hat African Americans, they hate their families, they hate 'Mexicans,' they hate indians, they hate people from India, they even hate themselves.

Their own politicians think that their world, life, Government is a joke. They even tried to take away Health Insurance benefits from those they label "Obese."

When you "Hate" artwork, The Arts I have no pity. That's where it's at, what they want: Wealth. The artists hold more wealth and power in the world than anyone else. That's what you want and YOU rub your nose in a sh!tpile slamming it.

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carl wrote on 03/06/2010 02:34:12 PM:

How much is this pile of brush going to cost??? I can't believe anyone would spend tax money for this. This is not art!

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flyintheointment wrote on 03/06/2010 11:49:38 AM:

I'm all for public art, but...you gotta be kiddin' me! Hope he uses a lot of flame retardant because this just looks like a big (and expensive) pile of kindling to me!

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dc2030 wrote on 03/06/2010 11:35:04 AM:

more wasted money on crap. when will the madness end.

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TheVoice wrote on 03/06/2010 11:33:52 AM:

how long before the project is uprooted? more or less, what is the expected lifespan of this project?

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