

Saddle Lake artist designs sculpture for children

**Joan Taillon
Sweetgrass Writer
Edmonton**

A \$35,000 sculpture entitled Buffalo Mountain will be placed in W. C. "Tubby" Bateman Park in early September. The Strathcona Park and Playground Redevelopment Society received a grant for approximately half the cost from the Alberta Foundation of the Arts to commission an interactive, climbable sculpture for the playground. The idea is to make art more accessible to children.

An independent jury consisting of representatives from the city, the community, and artists unanimously chose "Buffalo Mountain" from 23 submissions from Alberta artists.

The winning artist, Stewart Steinhauer, is from Saddle Lake.

The jury did not know whose work they were judging until after the voting. Steinhauer's sculpture, which he provided in miniature to the jury "was by far and above the best submission," according to playground society president Mildred Thill.

"As far as I know this will be the first sculpture in definitely the city of Edmonton, probably Alberta, probably Canada that conforms to current children's playground standards and is a sculpture intended specifically for children. But it is an artistic work that has a lot of appeal for adults as well."

Steinhauer says he started carving after the birth of his first child in 1973. He said he was "so in awe of a woman's power to create that I - imitation is what it's called. . . . When I look at the roles that Creator has given men and women, it puzzles me that women have been given so much work and men so little." Therefore, he said, "I as a man feel obligated to do whatever I can to contribute to building society." That's the only way he can explain how he got started. "There's nobody around here who carves," said Steinhauer. "I had no exposure to so-called art or sculpture." He said the day after the birth of his child there was a little piece of tree root on the ground, he pulled out his pocket knife and started whittling by the fire.

"Before that I'd say I was completely atheistic, and I would say I continued to be completely atheistic for a good many years after that on a conscious level, but there I made this little carving and it was somehow spiritually linked to my new child. Even though on a conscious level I would deny that; I remember feeling that."

Later on, Steinhauer added, "quitting drinking and getting into the sweat were pivotal experiences, just like the birth of a child; and I think that I launched into a period of carving there that would be at least 10 years. . . . It was like a cathartic thing or a healing. If I would get into trouble or something traumatic would happen, I didn't know how to talk about it and get it out that way, which is really simple and

probably the best way to do it. But at that time all I had was carving, so when I look back at that period, I see each piece represents some attempt on my part to let go of some hurt."

Those pieces have added up. "In my commercial period, it's been over a thousand (pieces)" said Steinhauer. Outside of that, he estimates he carved 80 to 100 in the first 17 years "just trying to release something."

In 1991 he had his first commercial exhibit at West End Gallery in Edmonton. Most of his work is in a smaller scale in soft stone for indoors, but in 1999 he won a competition in Banff for "outdoor placements throughout the townsite."

Thill is very excited that Edmonton children will enjoy Steinhauer's work every day.

"Child accessible art should not be an oxymoron," said Thill. "Children should have access to art like anyone else. Instead, they are constantly told, 'Don't touch that,' and 'Get off of that.' This will be the first playground in the City of Edmonton to have a sculpture specifically designed for children to climb over and around."