
2009
RUDY BRUNER AWARD
PROJECT DATA



PROJECT DATA

Please answer questions in space provided. Applicants should feel free to use photocopies of the application forms if needed. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

Project Name The Community Chalkboard & Podium Location Charlottesville, Virginia

Owner The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection Free Expression

Project Use(s) Interactive Monument to Free Expression, Public art, Debates, Performances, Rallies, Public Gathering

Project Size approximately 250 square feet Total Development Cost less than \$200,000

Annual Operating Budget (if appropriate) _____

Date Initiated design competition 1999 Percent Completed by December 1, 2008 100%

Project Completion Date (if appropriate) April 2006

Attach, if you wish, a list of relevant project dates _____

Application submitted by:

Name Peter O'Shea Title Principal

Organization Siteworks

Address 826-C Hinton Avenue City/State/Zip Charlottesville, Va 22902

Telephone (434) 923-8100 Fax (434) 295-6611

E-mail oshea@siteworks-studio.com Weekend Contact Number (for notification): 434-284-1004

Key Participants (Attach an additional sheet if needed)

Organization	Key Participant	Telephone/e-mail
Public Agencies <u>City of Charlottesville</u>	<u>Maurice Cox (former mayor)</u>	<u>mdc5e@virginia.edu</u>

Architect/Designer Robert Winstead AIA rwinstead@shwgroup.com

Developer The Thomas Jefferson Center Josh Wheeler jjw@tjcenter.org

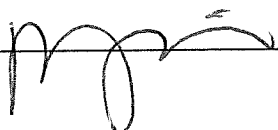
Professional Consultant _____

Community Group _____

Other _____

Please indicate how you learned of the *Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence*. (Check all that apply).
 Direct Mailing Magazine Advertisement Previous RBA entrant Other (please specify)
 Professional Newsletter Previous Selection Committee member
 Organization Magazine Calendar Online Notice
 Bruner/Loeb Forum

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2009
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ABSTRACT



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Please answer questions in space provided. Applicants should feel free to use photocopies of the application forms if needed. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

Project Name The Community Chalkboard & Podium: An Interactive Monument to Free Expression

Address City Hall Plaza City/State/ZIP Charlottesville, Virginia

1. Give a brief overview of the project, including major project goals.

The Community Chalkboard and Podium are a tangible, enduring and interactive embodiment of the concept of free expression. Located directly in front of Charlottesville's City Hall and beside the city's amphitheater, the monument consists primarily of a two-sided wall of Buckingham slate, approximately 54 feet long (108' of writing space) by 7.5 feet high, on which members of the public may express their views, in chalk, on any subject they choose.

In addition, the monument's design includes a podium intended to serve as a contemporary soapbox from which individuals may address both planned and impromptu public gatherings. This has become the place of choice for political rallies and demonstrations for the city.

The primary goals of the project were to provide the public with a place where they could actively engage their right to free expression in a multitude of forms while enlivening a formerly under-utilized area of downtown Charlottesville. It was important that this monument was intellectually accessible to all people and that it did not "self-select" a certain demographic of users. This has proven to be the case. It is important to note that this project was conceived as a component of the extension of the existing pedestrian Mall and as an important companion piece to an expanded downtown outdoor concert venue.

2. Why does the project merit the *Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence*? (You may wish to consider such factors as: effect on the urban environment; innovative or unique approaches to any aspect of project development; new and creative approaches to urban issues; design quality.)

The first of its kind in the public realm of the U.S, this interactive, democratic and uncensored monument to the first amendment provides a venue for the practice of the right to free expression on a daily basis. It is operated in an open-ended manner that does not segregate or discriminate on any level. People of all walks of life, every economic stratum, all political affiliations, all races, religions and sexual orientations, all levels of education and of every age actively engage the monument. People express themselves with chalk words and images and utilize the podium to present their opinions to the public. The project is purposefully confrontational to embody and express the primary intention of the first amendment to protect our right to petition our elected officials and to act as an additional check in the checks and balance system. It has become a destination for both the community and for people from outside of the region and has become the place of choice for political demonstrations, art installations and ad hoc oration. Expressions of political opinions, love and hatred, tolerance and prejudice, religious faith and skepticism, worries, hopes and resolutions for the future sit side by side on the wall.

It creates a unique place for community involvement that is inherently dynamic and flexible. In the words of one downtown resident, "it has a gravitational pull, you feel compelled to write something as you pass by and to peruse what others have written, which is sometimes funny, sometimes profound and sometimes offensive, but always free".

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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1. Describe the underlying values and goals of the project. What, if any, significant trade-offs were required to implement the project?

"Above all else, the First Amendment means that government has no power to restrict expression because of its message, its ideas, its subject matter, or its content. To permit the continued building of our politics and culture, and to assure self-fulfillment for each individual, our people are guaranteed the right to express any thought, free from government censorship."
Thurgood Marshall 1972

"Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties."
John Milton 1644

To create a dynamic, interactive and civic place of public discourse and dialogue that is open to all and that does not segregate, separate or self select. To create a place that celebrates and promotes the first amendment right to free expression shared by all Americans in a way that is active and challenging.

To honor the intent of the first amendment as a means of petitioning and challenging our elected officials.

2. How has the project impacted the local community?

The monument wall and podium have collectively helped to create a place in Charlottesville for public interaction and expression that previously did not exist in such a fashion. It has become a place that catalyzes engagement and has become an instant landmark in the city and a destination for people from afar. It is the place of choice for virtually every political rally or demonstration and has been claimed by the public as a venue for a diversity of events and performances that occur throughout the year. An ongoing series of events and programs are operated around and on the monument and are supplemented by the day to day use of individuals and groups. A small sampling of some of the events that occur at the monument include: Political/ Campaign Speeches and Debates; High School Debates and concerts; Annual poetry contest; New Year's Resolutions Wall; Silent Movie Nights, Annual song and Performance Contest by the Music Resource Center; Installations and events by local Art groups; Various political demonstrations and rallies, including Eyes Wide Open; Chalk Art activities organized by the local Discovery Museum.

During the development process, the project sparked a lively and interesting debate about the meaning of free speech in contemporary society and how it should be engaged. It opened up avenues of discussion that challenged misperceptions about free expression, and allowed for a forthright dialogue about community fears related to the potential for hateful and vulgar speech. It has affected the community at large on some levels and, perhaps more importantly, it has affected countless individuals on a personal level: A usually stoic Turkish immigrant was reduced to emotional tears and frantic scrawling all over the wall at the ability to act so freely; A homeless man makes his daily ritual the writing of his children's names on the wall; outpourings of support to the victims of the Virginia Tech shootings covers the wall; political back and forths increase in intensity as elections loom; letters of love and hate appear daily; verses from the bible can always be found.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION (CONT'D)

3. Describe the key elements of the development process, including community participation where appropriate.

The project began in 1998 as a design competition. In 2000 and 2001 a series of public meetings and gallery exhibitions were held to promote public awareness of the project leading up to a public hearing and review by the city council to support the project moving forward. The gallery exhibitions included interactive simulations of the actual monument wall and allowed for visitors to write and draw in chalk for the extent of the show. After initial conceptual review the project went into a fund raising phase and essentially waited to mesh with evolving city plans for the renovation of the project area.

Numerous outreach programs were undertaken with local public and private schools where the idea of the monument and the constitution in general were used as an element of the curriculum in both the study of government and in the arts. These programs have continued to use the monument as a case study and in the case of the Governor's School for the Arts Summer Program have used the monument as a place for artistic creations.

4. Describe the financing of the project. Please include all funding sources and square foot costs where applicable.

The funding for the was entirely through private donations. the Thomas Jefferson Center leases approximately 250 square feet of the public pedestrian mall for a nominal yearly fee.

The overall cost of the monument was just less than \$200,000, inclusive of design fees.

5. Is the project unique and/or does it address significant urban issues? Is the model adaptable to other urban settings?

It is believed to be the only monument to the First Amendment of its kind. In many ways it has unearthed an inherent desire by people of all walks of life to express themselves publicly. The overwhelming amount of writing that occurs on the wall (all vertical surfaces typically fill within 4 to 8 hours of a cleaning) seems to illustrate a desire for civic interaction in the public realm that otherwise doesn't exist. The model is highly adaptable due to it's simplicity of form and construction and has generated interest from other municipalities and institutions that have visited.

"With world events as they are, we need the Community Chalkboard now! What a powerful way for all of us to express our deepest thoughts and greatest hopes for our nation and the world."

Sissy Spacek,
Academy Award-winning actress,
and Trustee of the Thomas Jefferson Center

"The idea is gutsy, scary and fascinating. Not many cities would have the nerve, but Charlottesville, VA, deep in Thomas Jefferson country, decided to honor its civic patron saint with a living memorial to his ideals."
Boston Globe editorial,

2009
RUDY BRUNER AWARD
ARCHITECT
OR DESIGNER
PERSPECTIVE



ARCHITECT OR DESIGNER PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by a design professional who worked as a consultant on the project, providing design, planning, or other services. Copies may be given to other design professionals if desired.

Name	Peter O'Shea	Title	Principal
Organization	Siteworks	Telephone	(434) 923-8100
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1. Describe the design concept of this project, including urban design considerations, choice of materials, scale, etc.

The concept for the project was to provide a public, interactive monument that embodies the intentions of the first amendment to the constitution of the United States of America. The idea was to create a unique and dynamic social place that fostered expression, debate and community for all people without exclusion or censorship.

The monument is comprised of two locally quarried slate veneered walls and a slate veneered speaker's podium. The first wall is twelve feet by seven feet tall and includes an inscription of the first amendment and an inscription of a quote from Justice Thurgood Marshall selected in a public process by local high school students. The longer of the two walls is forty feet in length and seven feet tall. A six foot square podium set at a comfortable seat height is located at the southeastern corner of the longer wall. The podium is supplied with a dedicated power source and is inscribed with a quote by John Milton, also selected by the local high school students. Both walls include a stainless steel chalk storage tray with an integrated fiber optic lighting system. The wall is constructed of locally quarried natural cleft slate panels from Buckingham, Virginia. The pieces are fabricated on a regular module of 1x 4 feet or 2 x 4 feet and attached with custom made stainless steel anchors with no mortar joints. The project is located as an anchor to the newly extended pedestrian mall in conjunction with a new transit center and expanded civic amphitheater.

2. Describe the most important social and programmatic functions of the design.

A few months ago I ran into a man named Terrell who told me he thought the monument was a beautiful thing. Not beautiful to look at but beautiful to use, beautiful in the fact of itself, that all were truly equal to express themselves here for whatever purpose they chose. He came here to grieve over his homelessness and the disconnection with his children it created. He said he cried by writing down his thoughts and that by doing this everyday he also maintained hope. This is what the monument is about. It is about how people engage it. It is not about looking beautiful, or being clever or hip. It is not about being sustainable as defined by contemporary culture; it is about sustaining and catalyzing democracy and community. It is about creating a dynamic and interactive place that celebrates the right we have as Americans to express ourselves freely, to challenge our elected officials and each other and to exercise our inherent desire to make our voice heard.

This is a place of dynamic social interaction and constant change and represents a truly dynamic social landscape. The minimalism of the formal design is intended to avoid overt symbolic and static expression of an idea in favor of a conceptual and functional clarity. This formal minimalism is intended to support the acts of expression that occur on the wall and podium. The monument is meant to be a vehicle for the engagement of this basic right and is intended to spark debate and create dialogue and not meant as an object to be appreciated for its own sake. The project embodies an ethic of process, an aesthetic clarity, a timelessness of materials, and a focus on community involvement. It has created a place where people feel compelled to express themselves and engage with each other; a place that is full of hope and conflict, argument and agreement, love and hate, intellect and ignorance.

ARCHITECT OR DESIGNER PERSPECTIVE (CONT'D)

3. Describe the major challenges of designing this project and any design trade-offs or compromises required to complete the project.

Perhaps the biggest challenge of this project was in keeping it simple and not letting "design" override the clarity of the intent. Due to the commitment to the idea and to the hard work by our client to promote the idea and foster a vibrant collaboration with the city few real compromises were required. There was an expectation that there would be more significant political and public resistance to the idea, and surely there was a good deal. However, the support for the project by a broad spectrum of the people far outweighed the opposition, and generally continues today with the monument now in operation for almost three years.

The private/ public interface and the coordination with other city projects (mall expansion, transit center and amphitheater) was for most part smooth. The city of Charlottesville illustrated exemplary collaboration and support for the project by pro-actively initiating the interface between the monument project and the mall expansion.

Likewise, the political leadership of the city, while clearly concerned over the potential for negative expression did not operate from a foundation of fear. They saw in the project a greater good than than the potential for bad and took significant political risk in helping make the project a reality.

4. Describe the ways in which the design relates to its urban context.

The monument is located at the eastern terminus of the newly extended Downtown Pedestrian Mall originally designed by Lawrence Halprin. It is located directly in front of the Charlottesville City Hall and is adjacent to an improved civic amphitheater and a new community transit and visitor center. This location is a primary pedestrian thoroughfare in the downtown area and the location weekly concerts and events throughout the year. The activation of this space by both the monument and the amphitheater has transformed a formerly vacant and less-than-civic zone around City Hall. The monument has contributed significantly to this transformation. This has become the place of choice for numerous yearly events by local community groups, for political rallies and demonstrations and for a diversity of performances and lectures.

The region is the original home of both James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, the two primary contributors and authors of the First Amendment. Thomas Jefferson's home, Monticello, can be seen in the distance from the site of the Monument. The wall is oriented with the East-West direction of the Mall (Main Street) with its long planes facing North and South. The Wall and Podium locations were coordinated with the design of the Mall extension and sit within a new planting of Willow Oaks (*Quercus phellos*) that will, in time transform the context from open and sunny to shaded and contained by a green canopy.

More than anything else, the project creates a dynamic community place. People both love and hate this project, it stirs emotions and opinions as intended. The monument is full of all of the potential that resides in the hearts and minds of the people who engage it. It is as beautiful or ugly, intelligent or ignorant, spiritual or vulgar, compelling or inane, serious or silly, uplifting or frightening as they are. It is about people, community and democracy. It is a project about human interaction, change and process. It is not a landscape in the conventional sense yet it functions like one with diurnal and seasonal cycles that express a kind of core sample of human attitudes and opinions. It has been claimed by the people of the city as their own and has etched itself into the collective identity of Charlottesville.

2009
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DEVELOPER
PERSPECTIVE



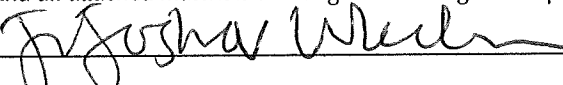
DEVELOPER PERSPECTIVE

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This sheet is to be filled out by the person who took primary responsibility for project financing or is a representative of the group which did.

Name	J. Joshua Wheeler, Esq.	Title	Associate Director
Organization	The Thomas Jefferson Center	Telephone	(434) 295-4784
Address	400 Worrell Drive	City/State/ZIP	Charlottesville, Va 22911-8691
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1. What role did you or your company play in the development of this project? Describe the scope of involvement.

The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression is a unique organization, devoted solely to the defense of free expression in all its forms. While its charge is sharply focused, the Center's mission is broad. It is as concerned with the musician as with the mass media, with the painter as with the publisher, and as much with the sculptor as the editor. Convinced that an informed citizenry is the strongest defense of free expression, the Thomas Jefferson Center has made education the cornerstone of all its programs. The Center reaches out to the public through its many publications, conferences and colloquiums. Recognizing that constructive symbolism has long been a catalyst for public awareness, the Center generated the idea for a monument to free expression to be located publicly in Charlottesville, VA and commissioned the design for the Community Chalkboard and Podium through the facilitation of an open design competition. The Center facilitated the process of securing city approvals for the idea, assembled an outside review board and advisory panel to shape the process and select the (unanimously chosen) winning design. The Center then spent years in advocacy, public meetings and in raising awareness, funds and community support for the project.

2. What trade-offs or compromises were required during the development of the project?

Incredibly few trade-offs or compromises were required in the process of realizing this project. This is due in many ways to the clarity, conviction and simplicity of the design, and more importantly to the bravery and willingness of the city of Charlottesville in its support of the creation of this project in a prominent and meaningful public place. The public review process and the collaboration with the city in general actually led to a number of significant improvements to the project. Most notable is the adjustment of the monument location to the center of the pedestrian mall extension as a significant eastern anchor to this most important urban street. At the time of the design competition this area was a service lane with utility bill drop-box, by the time construction of the monument commenced a coordinated project for extending the mall, building a transit center and expanding the civic amphitheater were underway. The timing was slowed at the outset due to the need for coordination with the cities planning, an extensive public hearing process was needed (although this was seen as an important embodiment of the idea of the monument, so in no way a compromise or trade-off). Even the requirement in the lease agreement with the city to provide once weekly cleaning, originally thought to be too frequent, has not proven to be a burden. In fact, the Center now coordinates volunteers to clean the wall twice a week due to the incredibly heavy use.

DEVELOPER PERSPECTIVE (CONT'D)

3. How was the project financed? What, if any, innovative means of financing were used?

The project was financed entirely with private donations. It is located in the plaza that fronts City Hall on public land that is leased to the Thomas Jefferson Center for a nominal fee. Numerous fund raising events were held that served the joint purpose of raising not only money and awareness of the project but as opportunities for creating an ongoing dialogue about the intent of the project.

As a "Living Monument" these efforts to raise funds continue as a means for operating the monument, programming events, and maintaining the monument as a place of dynamic interaction. Community involvement continues as part of the operation of the monument as different school, civic and professional groups volunteer to provide the sweat equity of the bi-weekly cleaning.

4. What do you consider to be the most and least successful aspects of the project?

By far the most successful aspect of the project is how heavily and consistently it is used. It exceeded our wildest expectations. In fact, one of our early worries prior to construction was whether or not people would use it enough. While the writing and drawing found on the wall has been exciting, what has been even more satisfying is the way the community has claimed the space as the location of choice for all manner of events ranging from high school debates, political speeches, lectures, outdoor movies to dance performances, demonstrations, concerts and a number of annual events held by local groups. Many of these events are part of the Center's own programming but even more are independent of our efforts. It has become the defining element of the plaza in front of city hall. On a practical note, it has been a somewhat unexpected success that the proportion of negative or offensive speech is significantly lower than originally feared by many early critics of the project. Likewise there has been virtually no significant vandalism of the project in the three years since it was unveiled.

The least successful aspect of the monument is perhaps a bit of (as yet) unmet potential. The monument is so heavily used that it can, to some, seem to discourage the more expansive creation of deliberate artworks in favor of the quick written expression of the passerby. The temporal nature of the project contributes to this. Developing programming to better encourage and facilitate this type of work is a primary reason for applying for this award.

2009
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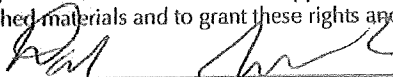
OTHER PERSPECTIVE

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Name	Dahlia Hannah Lithwick	Title	Contributing Editor
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1. What role did you play in the development of this project?

I played no role in the development of this project. I gave the keynote address at the dedication ceremony.

2. Describe the impact that this project has had on the your community. Please be as specific as possible.

The Community Chalkboard has become a symbol for unfettered and unrestrained speech and artistic expression throughout the city of Charlottesville. The board itself represents an ongoing conversation within the community about the issues of the day. At any given moment it is a place on which political, social and cultural ideas are expressed. During the months before the federal election it became a city-wide barometer of public opinion. But beyond just the board itself, the area around it has become -- both explicitly and implicitly -- a gathering place for spontaneous protests, rallies, and exhibits. Whether you are organizing a candlelight vigil or circulating a petition, the chalkboard has come to be Charlottesville's dedicated speakers' corner; the tangible embodiment of the Framers "free marketplace of ideas." It is not merely a "monument" to free speech but an ongoing experiment in it.

As a resident of Charlottesville and a legal journalist it is quite extraordinary to witness a community-wide space for the expression of protest, dissent, and solidarity. What this means for the community is, in my view, quite profound. It signals a city-wide understanding that there is a physical space in the center of town in which you are likely to encounter new and sometimes unpopular ideas. As residents we have learned to accept that there is a city space in which anyone can be saying or writing anything at any moment. That sounds frightening at first blush. But in practice it has fostered a deep sense that this is a community willing to listen to itself speak and brave enough to encounter new ideas. In an era of media consolidation and deep ideological polarization, spaces of that sort are increasingly hard to find.

OTHER PERSPECTIVE (CONT'D)

3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? Did you participate in making them?

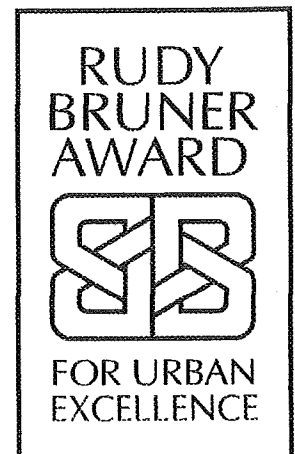
I was not involved in the development stages of this project.

4. What do you consider to be the the most and least successful aspects of this project?

In my view the most successful aspect of the Community Chalkboard has been the fact that it has been so wholeheartedly embraced by the local community. Only a few years after its construction it's hard to imagine a time before its existence. Everyone in town knows it, every small child has drawn on it, artists have exhibited their work near it. It has been embraced by Charlottesville in ways few of us fully anticipated. Moreover, for all the anxiety that had been expressed before construction -- fears that it would be unfit for children and teeming with obscenity -- the chalkboard has for the most part fostered very civil discourse. In a sense the lesson here was that the community trusted itself, and the community rose to the occasion.

If any aspect of the monument has been unsuccessful it is in fostering real dialogue. The chalkboard has become a center for speech, yes, but it's not always clear that it is a locus of ongoing debate. Speakers express themselves but do not always engage; writers share their own views but do not always react to others. My sense is that the chalkboard is a good start in that it encourages us to speak more freely and to hear what others have said. But I would like to see it become a place for more vibrant and passionate exchange/debate/conflict. If the first step toward freer speech is openness, the next needs to be vigorous disagreement. This may, however, be Charlottesville's failure, as opposed to the chalkboard's.

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Name JOHN HERMSMEIER Title INSTRUCTOR
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Signature John E. Hermsmeier

1. What role did you play in the development of this project?

2. Describe the impact that this project has had on the your community. Please be as specific as possible.

1. What role did you play in the development of this project?

I facilitated the engagement of my high school students in both the development and culmination of the Community Chalkboard and Podium: A Monument to Free Expression. As a teacher of environmental science at Renaissance School in Downtown Charlottesville and founder of the non-profit Environmental Education Center, my connection to the project is not obvious. One of my students at Renaissance School selected the Monument and its accompanying issues as the centerpiece of her Senior Thesis, and the entire school, along with other area schools, became engaged with the project by producing large thematic murals on canvas in the space that would become the chalkboard.

Informed by my work through the Environmental Education Center to develop curricula around the themes of interdependence and sustainability, my teaching at both Renaissance School and the University of Virginia's Summer Enrichment Program (a residential program for gifted students from Virginia, the United States and even the World) evolved to include an opening component where students identify things truly meaningful to them as individuals and weave them together as a class to form a theme that serves as the basis for a course of study. When one class chose "expression" as its theme, I contacted Peter O'Shea and he graciously gave part of his day with little notice to share the Monument project (before it was actually built) with my students. They left highly impressed, and made statements such as "Maybe I could get something like this started in my town!"

2. Describe the impact that this project has had on your community. Please be as specific as possible.

The dedication of the Monument was one of the most powerful public events I have attended in my hometown. It rivals our nation's commemoration of the Lewis and Clark bicentennial, which was held at Monticello and the University of Virginia and featured a multitude of speakers, including Tribal Chiefs. In both cases, I was witness to my community's search for both its current and historic identity in the context of the creation of our country. The Monument ceremony, attended by folks of every age, ideology and background, featured speakers from famous authors to high school students as they interpreted the importance of free expression. I stood among my students that day with great pride and hope for my community, my country and my world.

Since that day, countless individuals have expressed their First Amendment rights by writing, and in some cases erasing, myriad ideas. The power of the Monument lies not in the quality of what is written on it, but in its physical manifestation of the idea of free speech. This is a sometimes subtle, yet enormous, reality that has had a concomitant subtle, and enormous, impact on our community in terms of its voice.

3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? Did you participate in making them?

While clearly an advocate for this project, I appreciated the trade-offs inherent in it and tried to engage my various students in these issues in an unbiased manner. They inevitably would quickly identify and frame the same trade-offs that the community struggled with (what about curse words? Etc.). The parent of one of my students was an outspoken critic of the project, and he even went so far as to erect a mock version of the wall to illustrate its potential shortcomings. Interestingly, this same individual, with the help of his daughter and her school, would regularly scrub off the chalk from the engraved parts of the chalkboard that were rendered illegible by the addition of chalk by those unconcerned with their damage to the overall experience of the Monument. The transformation from antagonist to caretaker was interesting to see.

In the end, I considered the potential downsides of the Monument, like free expression itself, to be well worth the risk.

4. What do you consider to be the most and least successful aspects of this project?

The most successful aspect of this project, and one that rises above anything that is said or written at the Monument itself, is the physical embodiment of the First Amendment. To me, this reality alone justifies the establishment and continuance of the Monument. Having said that, the least successful aspect of the project is the loss of ongoing community dialog surrounding it as a Monument specifically and free expression generally that was so dynamic during its consideration, implementation and dedication. I strongly believe that this application for a Rudy Bruner Award successfully addresses this situation and builds the foundation for the next iteration of what this Monument can mean to our community, our nation and our world.

2009
RUDY BRUNER AWARD
OTHER
PERSPECTIVE



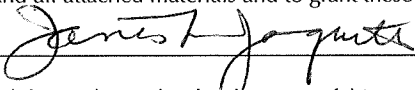
OTHER PERSPECTIVE

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Signature



1. What role did you play in the development of this project?

When the Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression was in the process of raising money for construction of the Community Chalkboard & Podium, they hosted a fund-raising event -- "An Evening of Free Expression" -- at which I interviewed actress Sissy Spacek on stage at the Paramount Theater in Charlottesville.

Additionally, my husband and I made personal financial contributions to the project.

And I have also been known to wield a power-washer wand to hose down the chalkboard for its weekly cleaning, and my husband is the replenisher of the chalk.

2. Describe the impact that this project has had on the your community. Please be as specific as possible.

If you want to know what government workers think about the power of free expression, just tell them there will be a public chalkboard right outside their office building, and that anyone, at any time, can write anything at all on that chalkboard. The officials who work in Charlottesville's City Hall were freaked out of their minds over the prospect of such totally free expression -- up close, and personal, to boot. Of course, this was quite entertaining for the rest of us, who followed the controversy in the local newspapers and blogs.

Much discussion over the First Amendment ensued, including the airing of fears that profanity would assault our tender eyes whenever we approached the monument.

From my own observations, I'd say that expressions of love far outnumber profanity. And political opinions are nearly as numerous as the declarations of love.

People have flocked to the chalkboard the way hummingbirds appear out of nowhere to devour the sugar water in a newly-placed birdfeeder. There is, apparently, a deep desire for all of us to express ourselves, to say "I was here" and "this is what I think." Additionally, the podium has become the prime spot for people to base protests, (such as the Quakers' "Eyes Wide Open" anti-war exhibit), a place for citizens to announce their candidacies, and it's where our local state delegates meet with constituents to discuss and defend their positions on upcoming legislation.

OTHER PERSPECTIVE (CONT'D)

3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? Did you participate in making them?

I don't know -- I was not part of that process.

4. What do you consider to be the the most and least successful aspects of this project?

An important aspect of this project has been raising public awareness about the First Amendment at a time when our Constitutional rights have been rapidly eroding. You can't walk past this centrally-located monument without the subject of free expression coming to mind -- and into conversation.

And the design of the monument is brilliant. They took a familiar object -- a chalkboard -- and turned it into a vehicle for expression, and into a reason to think about, and talk about, our Constitutional rights as part of our daily discourse.

There is something wonderful about picking up a piece of chalk at that monument, because the sensation you get while drawing or writing goes something like this: This is my right as an American -- and here I am, exercising that right -- and it feels good!

For me, the most exciting part of the project was the controversy surrounding it before it became a reality. That's when the most interesting and heated discussions took place. I would like to see the monument and podium put to more rigorous and frequent use as a location for education about the Constitution and government, for outreach to under-served sections of the citizenry (the poor, and poorly educated, and immigrants) in order to keep the dialogue about free expression fresh, relevant, and engaging.

I would love to see gatherings aimed at, say, Spanish-speaking people, or African American youth, so that they can be made aware of the possibilities presented by our Constitutional right to free expression.

OTHER PERSPECTIVE

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Signature 

1. What role did you play in the development of this project?

None. I am an architect and resident of Charlottesville, so I speak from the point of view of an informed citizen, an appreciative designer, and a user of the space.

2. Describe the impact that this project has had on the your community. Please be as specific as possible.

The Chalkboard was a bold, risky move. By offering up a wall that required the collaboration of the community to "complete" it, the project could have been ignored, even resented as a misunderstood obstacle. Instead, it has become an unbelievably popular forum for adults and children alike. Perfectly located opposite City Hall, the Visitor Center, and the amphitheater, it stands at the intersection of the community's social, municipal, tourist, and entertainment centers. The Chalkboard helps draw people toward this important public plaza by giving them something invigorating to see and do. On any given day of the year, people of every age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic condition leave their mark here. We see the many moods of the community and the individuals who make it up. A clear day in Spring brings a drawing of a bright yellow sun, with a declaration that life is beautiful. A gray day in Winter might give us a tirade about the economy or a recent election. In autumn, the wall becomes a colorful tapestry of orange and rust, with announcements of love ("I [heart] Sophie!!"). And summer invites sustained expressions inspired by dwelling on a sunny plaza—poetry, political manifestos, and personal ramblings. It is a truly inspired addition to the public life of Charlottesville.

OTHER PERSPECTIVE (CONT'D)

3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? Did you participate in making them?

Not having been involved in its development, I cannot speak to this aspect of the project. But I do know that the Chalkboard sparked some degree of controversy before people lived with it. Now it is an integral part of the community.

4. What do you consider to be the the most and least successful aspects of this project?

The Chalkboard is a tremendous achievement in so many ways. Its simple elegance is an exemplar of great design, architecture, urbanism, and public art. A deceptively minimal form, it simultaneously conjures up images of chalkboards, stage sets, and memorials, a rich and evocative blend of educational, expressive, and commemorative references. Its restraint provides a quiet backdrop for the voices of the community, and the diversity of expression gives the wall a wonderfully varied aesthetic, a kind of improvised, ephemeral beauty. Some eyes would see this aspect of the Chalkboard as a weakness, since it invites all manner of expression, from beautiful drawings and lyrical poetry to profane ranting and indecipherable cacophony. However, this is the actual strength of the project—it has become a continually evolving demonstration of an active, lively community.

Few artworks of any kind, particularly public art, manage to marry simple form and powerful expression. The Charlottesville Community Chalkboard is that rare example. As such, it deserves to be recognized alongside two other projects that knit together the private and public. The NAMES project—the AIDS memorial quilt—will continue to grow, indefinitely, until a cure is found, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial commingles the names of the fallen and the reflections of mourners on a surface that is irresistible to the touch. The Community Chalkboard combines the varied, fleeting beauty of the AIDS quilt with the unexpected intimacy of the Veterans Memorial. Yet, instead of commemorating death, it celebrates life. It reflects the community back onto itself by making visible the diversity of views and voices that constitute any society. In its own quiet way, the chalkboard has strengthened Charlottesville's image of itself.