

Manitoba artists thrilled by challenges posed by Bears on Broadway

Painter and sculptor Peter Sawatsky says Bears on Broadway has let him "give something back to the community" that helped him deal with the loss of his wife to cancer five years ago.

Sawatsky is one member of a huge, enthusiastic team of artists, sculptors, painters, fabricators, crane operators, fork lift operators, truckers and a host of other specialists who are ensuring the Bears on Broadway dream comes true.

"I'm painting two bears but have been on site doing a lot of other things such as mixing paints and reviewing the original artists' submissions." Sawatsky says.

The artist has created Bearealis World for Winpak Ltd. and Snowbank, a huge piggy bank that will stand opposite the Fort Garry Hotel, inviting passers-by to drop in a toonie for CancerCare.

Artist participation in Bears on Broadway began with a competition for the bear designs, with 135 coming in. Sawatsky says they were all quite original and the next step was to match up

artists with sponsors.

Famed wildlife artist Clarence Tillenius is one of the artists and has painted Knights of the Polar Circle for the sponsoring Manitoba Club as well as Pondering Grizzly for Paterson Global Foods Inc..

Other well-known names include Don Phalen, who has painted the Loony Bear for Scotia Bank, and artist Richard Osen, who fashioned a Road Safety Bear for MPIC.

Osen also created the original seven inch high bear model and a mock-up in foam that lead to two final molds into which Lafarge Cement experts poured huge quantities of cement, turning out ten 8,000-pound bears a week.

"CancerCare showed me a photograph of the prototype bear and asked if we could possibly do it," says plant supervisor Gerry de Rocquigny of Lafarge Cement.

"This was a first for me and it posed a lot of technical challenges, but we got a team of sculptors, statue builders, architects and other

people together and decided we could make it work."

Another key member of the team was Alfred Widmer, a well known local sculptor who has worked on the statuary of Fort Garry Place and theatre restorations.

Widmer solved a lot of the technical problems with the molds, which have 22 separate pieces to ensure each cast can be safely removed. He has also been responsible for later grinding, polishing and fixing any imperfections before the finished bears were shipped to Kapyong Barracks and the waiting artists.

Artist Hubert Theroux, president of the Assiniboia Group of Artists, was instrumental to the project. He's worked on painting five of the bears himself, including the Big Blue bear for the Blue Bombers and Bearister for sponsor Filmore Riley. He used PVC plumbing material to create its wig and also seven feet of steel rods to fashion some spectacles.