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Art takes shape

Students' work to hang over road

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About a dozen kids were invited into the Shouldice Brothers metal fabrication shop Monday to see their ideas and creativity cast into steel.

The metal artwork, which will hang from large arches at the M-66 entrance to downtown Battle Creek, is part of a downtown revitalization plan.

Local students entered artwork representing their ideas of Battle Creek, and the top four winners will see their ideas in the air above the road.

They also won scholarship money from the event's organizers, Battle Creek Unlimited's Arts and Industry Council. Grand prize winner Naomi Haralson of Bellevue High School won \$5,000.

Brittany McQuern, 13, won third place in her age group with a drawing of a snake representing Binder Park Zoo.

"I knew everybody was doing stuff about the Cereal City, and Binder Park Zoo, I've visited there I don't know how many times," she said while the group munched on Rice Krispies Treats and waited for a fabrication demonstration.

"It's amazing," McQuern said. "Not only does the school get to see it; everybody that's in Battle Creek; people who come to Battle Creek to see the city get to see my artwork also."

Dave Van Middlesworth, one of the owners of Shouldice Brothers, said Battle Creek Unlimited approached the company with the idea and he thought it was a good chance to give back to the community.

"It's kind of neat that we're doing something for the entry to the city," he said, "and trying to give back a little bit along the way, work with the kids and promote them along the way."

Van Middlesworth said the combined supplies and labor cost about \$23,000 and the tab was being picked up by BCU.

Several paper drawings and a couple of finished metal plates bore the kids' art; Sojourner Truth, a man with a healthy heart, a Battle Creek Central High School girls' basketball player and a cityscape featuring a giant bowl of cereal were among the concepts.

The young artists crowded around a Shouldice Brothers employee as he showed them how the artwork was scanned and sent to fabrication. The demonstration quickly moved over to the high-definition plasma cutter, which uses electricity and compressed gas to slice through steel plates.

With the kids standing about 12 feet away from the machine, it was fired up and a bright beam of heat began turning the heart man drawing into a metal reality.

NormaLynn Cutler, consultant owner of California-based Cutler Enterprises, said the work on display was selected from about 400 pieces.

"It was our company's idea to do it with our children," she said. "Let the children welcome people into the city of Battle Creek, and thereby get everybody to take ownership of the whole process and the project."

The gateway arches are still in development, but organizers are hoping to have them up by next year.

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