

Pole carvings at John Abel Park showcase local wildlife



John Abel Park, one of Aurora's newest greenspaces, is now an artistic destination following the installation of a series of wooden pole carvings immortalizing local wildlife.

The carvings, which were formally installed last week, are the works of noted Ontario chainsaw artist Bobbi Switzer, a resident of the Bruce Peninsula, and reflect not only the artistic passion of late deputy mayor John Abel, who died in 2018, but the park's position as a gateway to the David Tomlinson Nature Preserve.

“These carvings add a unique artistic touch to John Abel Park, blending seamlessly with the natural surroundings, said Mayor Tom Mrakas in a statement. “They're a fantastic addition to one of our most beloved green spaces, sparking curiosity, encouraging outdoor exploration, and celebrating the diverse species that call our region home.”

Announcing the new installation just off Hartwell Way, the Town saluted Switzer as “one of Canada's pioneering professional female chainsaw artists” who has been working in the medium for nearly 15 years.

“There's so much beauty in nature and that's my inspiration,” Switzer tells *The Auran*. “I myself live in the bush and am inspired daily by my surroundings, which is an all-natural setting, and I just kind of carve what I see in nature.”

Before becoming a chainsaw artist, Switzer says she was a children's book illustrator and fine arts painter, but shifted to a very different medium as a way to realize her vision.

“I stumbled upon chainsaw carving and loved it because now I can create something three-dimensional in my mind and bring it to reality,” she says. “As it's three dimensional, you can walk around it, you can touch it, and everything that came from your mind?you can touch and people can experience. I love painting, don't get me wrong, but you just look at it, where other ones you can touch it, walk around, see it behind and you can experience it fully, that idea that was in the artist's mind.”

When she was commissioned by the Town to create the sculptures, the task was simple enough: capturing the wildlife that was native to the area, including the trumpeter swan, which has made a comeback in Ontario thanks to the efforts of late Aurora resident Harry Lumsden.

“They basically said, whatever you want to do, as long as we can keep the native wildlife, [so] I was able to do not just animals, but also incorporate some of the plant life, like the trillium, some cattails and whatnot, and I guess it just really suited everything they wanted to portray in the carvings,” says Switzer, noting that initially the plan included making the carvings out of poles that had been donated to the Town, but they ultimately opted for Ontario white cedar for durability, its resistance to bugs, and the artistic

grain within the wood.

?I am very happy and pleased with how this all turned out,? she continues. ?I've got to be honest ? when I had it here at my studio, I fell in love with the pieces and didn't want to let them go, even though it was already commissioned as [Aurora's] pieces. This is the problem with being a chainsaw carver ? you love the work and you love the pieces, and for the short time they're here you really get to enjoy them and it's hard not to get attached to them!

?I think it's because the wood was once alive that when I carve a character inside the wood, it kind of brings a second life to that wood. It's not just like a concrete statue where you just look at it ? it stirs up joy in your heart when you look at these. A lot of my clients are repeat clients and they're continuously coming back for pieces because they said these pieces give them so much joy and I love hearing that.?

For more on Bobbi Switzer's work, follow her on Instagram @bobbichainsawcarving.

By Brock Weir