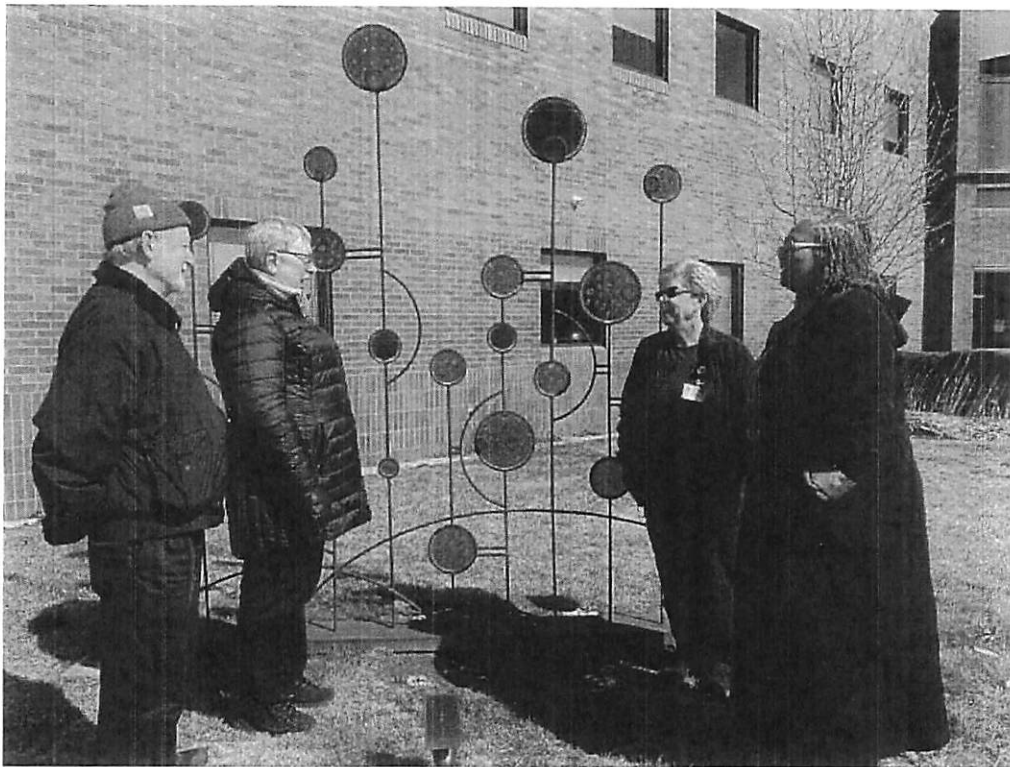


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Outdoor art effort continues to grow in Mount Clemens

Can be an 'economic driver' for community, organizers say



MCEP's Ed Bruley and Julie Matuzak speak with Toni Scola, a manager at Allied Health, and Kathy Banks, a board member. (MITCH HOTTS — THE MACOMB DAILY)

By **MITCH HOTTS** | mhotts@medianewsgroup.com | Macomb Daily



The people who brought public sculptures to Mount Clemens have added micro gardens on some of the city's roadways along with conference calls with the artists to the program.

Members of the nonprofit Macomb Cultural and Economic Partnership (MCEP) who have installed the sculptures say the efforts are part of a plan to grow art into the outdoor scenery.

They've targeted two areas for garden grooming: in front of the U.S. Post Office on Main Street and the bus stop at 276 South Gratiot Avenue, at the corner of Gratiot and Bellevue Street.

"These help make the community look good," said Julie Matuzak, a Macomb County commissioner who serves as chair of the MCEP. "It's an investment in our city that says we believe art can be part of our economy."



This sculpture, titled "Confessions" by Mike Sohikian, shows support for the people of Ukraine. It is owned by the Greater Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church congregation. (MITCH HOTTS — THE MACOMB DAILY)

The Sculpture Project is part of an ongoing partnership with the Michigan Sculpture Initiative in which outdoor works created by local artists are on display for one year, at



The varied collection can be seen up and down Gratiot Avenue as well as many other main streets running through the south end of Mount Clemens. A map provided by the MCEP provides locations and a suggested tour for all of the sculptures including those on First Street and Grand Avenue.

Officials say the project started in 2018 with 12 public sculptures and has grown to 24 in the four years since then.

Local businesses have chipped in with sponsorships to help MCEP launch the program. So far, the two entities have raised \$250,000, according to Ed Bruley, MCEP's board secretary.

"That says people believe in Mount Clemens," he said. "People believe in the businesses around here and they believe in the community. We have to keep encouraging people to develop and redeveloping this community."

The business community is supporting the program as well. Toni Scola, a manager at Allied Health, is among those that have a say in what sculptures go on display.

"I always go for the big, bling stuff, something that stands out," she said. "But overall, I think this is a great project. It shows community participations on all levels. It looks so nice to be part of the community."

Whenever possible, the sculptures are located near a restaurant or other local business with the hope people following the program will stop in for a bite to eat or to make a purchase. That further demonstrates an economic relationship between public art and community.

Bruley said the sculptures can act as an "economic driver" that brings people to a place, encourages them to stay around a little longer, and see what other businesses are nearby.

Organizers say they've also added conference calls with the artists as part of formal tours.

"We learned that during the pandemic," Matuzak said. "We learned that by having a group of 25 people standing around the sculpture have questions and this way, they can use technology to listen to the artist who created the work talk about how they came up with the concept. It's worked out well."

