

Artists finish designs for new Stonington Veterans Monument

Father, daughter of Anderson Artworks use skills to honor those who served

By CARRIE CZERWINSKI
Special to The Day

Stonington— With two days left before their Jan. 6 deadline, a father-daughter team worked diligently last Wednesday to complete five, 3-foot square, pen and ink drawings for the new Stonington Veterans Monument in front of the police station.

Gary and Elizabeth Anderson, of Anderson Artworks in Stonington, are two of the four artists chosen to have their work featured on the eight-sided memorial that will honor local veterans from World War I to the present.

The Andersons, who normally spend their time on projects such as carving wood signs for

many local business, painting and restoring antique carousel horses, have been funneling all their artistic talents, training and experience into drawing the panels over the past 3 1/2 weeks.

Gary Anderson, 64, said friends sent him newspaper articles in October about the town looking for proposals from local artists interested in creating the artwork for the monument, and discussed it with his daughter.

The pair thought they would like to use a skill set neither has used in years — drawing — and enthusiastically submitted their designs.

"Usually we do a little drawing," he said, "and turn it into wood or stone. This time we did a little drawing and turned it into a bigger drawing, and we got to use some of those skills we don't use."

Gary Anderson is not new to large-scale art projects. In fact

he carved the figureheads for both the whaling ship Charles W. Morgan at Mystic Seaport Museum and the reproduction of the schooner Amistad, and painted murals for the Watch Hill Carousel.

Elizabeth Anderson, 31, has been at her father's side since she was a child, as a height reference for stirrup placement for the carousel's horses and a muse for one of the murals on the carousels that her father painted.

"Beth literally started working on those horses at eight months old or something," he said, but added, "it's kind of been a family thing all along."

After graduating from Connecticut College with a degree in art, she worked with her father on weekends, but over the last year she has transitioned to working with her father full time and working at the Lyman Allen Art Museum in New

London on the weekends.

"It's kind of a messy job," she said, "but we like it," she said referring to the restoration work they do.

Their work for the monument faced a few obstacles along the way, including the short time frame for completion and a realization that their drawings could not simply be enlarged, but had to be redrawn full scale.

The work has been emotional at times.

One piece, based on the theme of sacrifice, depicts gravestones in a cemetery, purposely left nameless so that people can more easily empathize and feel a connection to the work.

"It's hard to work on because it's like a scene of Arlington (National Cemetery), and it's just a sea of graves, so it kind of hits you every time you look up and step back," she said.

Their creations are also per-

sonal.

"My dad was a World War II vet. He never talked much about it. He was a pacifist because of the war," Gary Anderson said.

"We have to remember, we're lucky enough to be here because a lot of people made it possible for us, and we forget that from time to time," he added.

In addition to a panel reflecting sacrifice, the five panels they are working on depict the ideas of war, local connection, lifesaving and homecoming.

The memorial will recognize local veterans who have served in the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, National Guard, Navy and Space Force, and will use Near Field Communication technology to allow visitors to put their smartphone near the monument and access a website containing the names of the veterans as well as digital media and video interviews.

Sarah Downie, local illustrator and a graduate of Montserrat College of Art, focused on honor and humanitarian effort, for her two panels. Sandra Alexander, a local designer and artist who owns Dessa Lea Productions, has designed the panel that welcomes visitors to the monument.

The four artists will each receive a share of a \$10,000 award funded by American Rescue Plan money.

Completed artwork will be scanned by Charter Oak Scanning before being sent off to be printed on porcelain tiles that will be installed on the monument. The base for the monument is in place and Buzzzi Memorials of Pawcatuck will begin construction in the spring. The original pieces of artwork will be hung at locations in town. The designs will be unveiled at the monument's official dedication on Flag Day, June 14.

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Artists Sandra Alexander and Sarah Downie, First Selectwoman Danelle Chesebrough and her Executive Assistant Stacey Haskell, and artists Gary Anderson and Elizabeth Anderson pose at Town Hall. Photo courtesy of Town of Stonington.