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Author:

[Jones, Phil](#)

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Phil Jones

An Evolving Mission

Right: Several in a series of 100 steel tree guards on Dunlap Avenue in the Sunnyslope neighborhood. Artist: Garth Edwards. Photo: Craig Smith.

Below: Several in a series of 300 medallions affixed to light poles on Central Avenue. They depict contemporary interpretations of traditional Native-American imagery and symbols. Artists: Howard Sice, Juan Navarette, Patricia Navarette, Doug Weigel. Photo: Craig Smith.

Phoenix's public art program was tested and almost eliminated during the unfortunate controversy over the "Wall Cycle to Ocotillo" in 1992. Reason prevailed, however, and the dialogue that took place between city leaders and the Phoenix Arts Commission resulted in revisions to the city's percent-for-art ordinance.

The changes refined the Arts Commission's role in administering the program and strengthened the role of citizens, other city departments and the city council in commissioning public art. For example, samples of an artist's past work are shown to a council subcommittee prior to contract approval. Proposed designs are shown to all council members before artwork is fabricated. The process sometimes seems more cumbersome, but it has helped build support for the program.

The arts commission has continued to implement the public art program in accordance with the goals of the 1988 master plan. We still place a high priority on involving artists as members of design teams planning major infrastructure projects. We also try to integrate art into the fabric of neighborhoods as much as possible. For example, we have asked artists to design wall treatments for booster and pump stations (ele-



ments of our water system) throughout the city.

At the same time, we are responding to new opportunities and changing political realities. We are developing public art projects that involve young people (a Police Activities League photography project) or focus on community education (artist-designed spaces or educational programs that demonstrate the use of recyclable materials in landscape design, the botanical uses for reclaimed water and the functions of recycling centers and wastewater treatment facilities). We are also trying to direct more of our resources into inner-city areas, which have seen less capital development than other parts of the city.

Our plan for 1996-97 includes thirty-eight projects in various stages of implementation, with a total program allocation of \$3.5 million (similar to the amounts budgeted a few years ago). The staff we have to administer these projects, however, has been cut by half. Next year, we will begin updating the 1988 plan. Our new plan will acknowledge both the city's growth over the past decade and changes in our capital program priorities.

Community involvement and education have been vital to the success of Phoenix's public art program. Citizens serve on the artist selection panels and neighborhood organizations contribute to the development of each project. The involvement of citizens and artists, through participation in public forums, will be an essential part of planning future art projects and revising the 1988 master plan.

