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SPOTLIGHT

Artists chosen to create downtown information kiosk on Sixth and Division

By ANNE KOPAS akopas@northfieldnews.com Feb 1, 2019 Updated 20 hrs ago



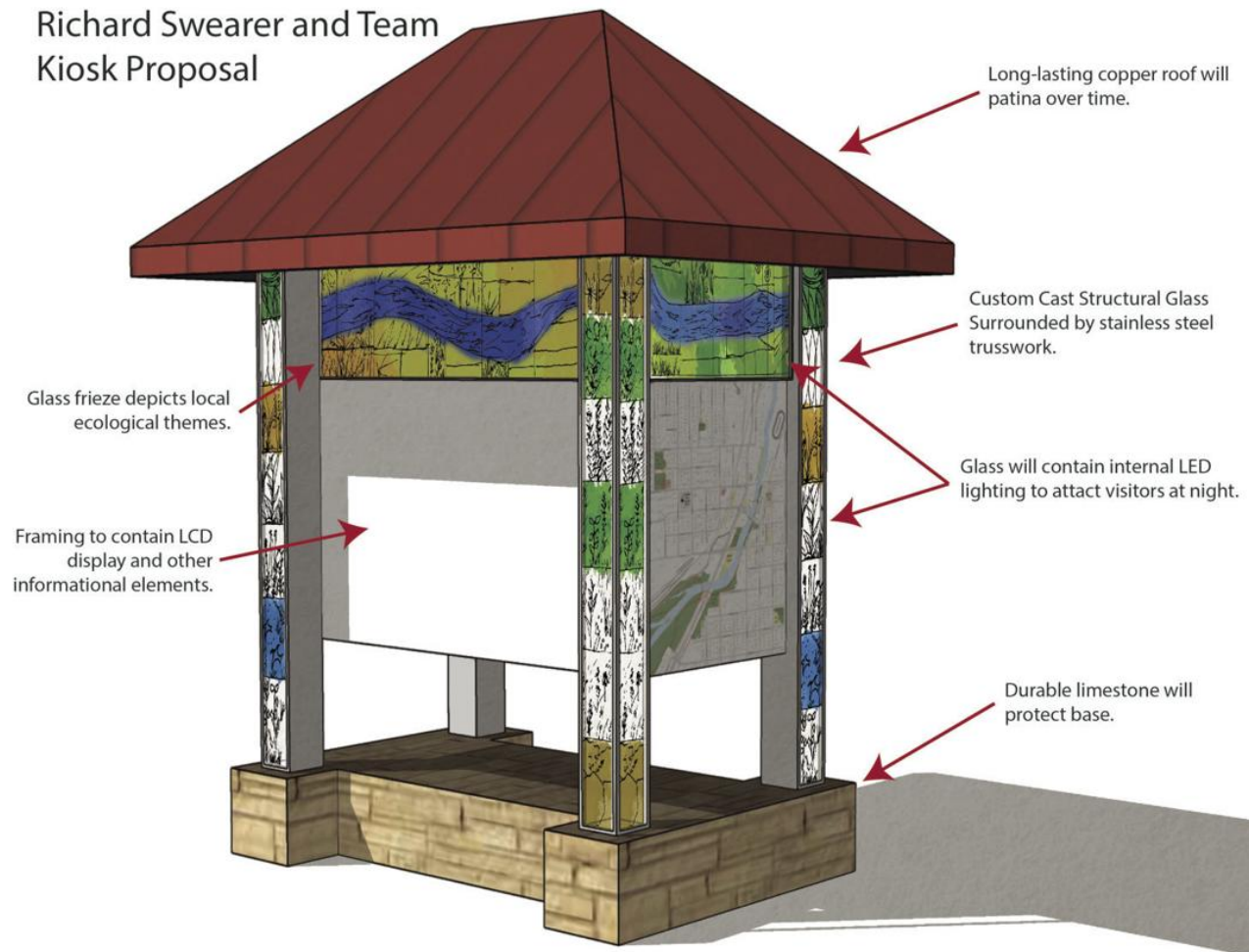
Rick Swearer demonstrates glassblowing in his Northfield Studio. Rick Swearer, son Keeney Swearer and Howard Osterue will work as a team to create an information kiosk in downtown Northfield. (Anne Kopas/Northfield News)

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The corner of Sixth and Division isn't really a pedestrian hotspot, but a new public art project hopes to change that.

Three Northfield artists are moving forward with plans to build an information kiosk on the corner in front of Family Fare, across from the Eco Gardens. Preliminary plans call for a free-standing, 10-foot structure built of metal, glass and stone that would display up-to-date information for visitors and

locals. Glass artist Rick Swearer and son Keeney Swearer, along with metalworker and Eco Gardens owner Howard Osterue, created the design chosen from 14 submissions from across the state.

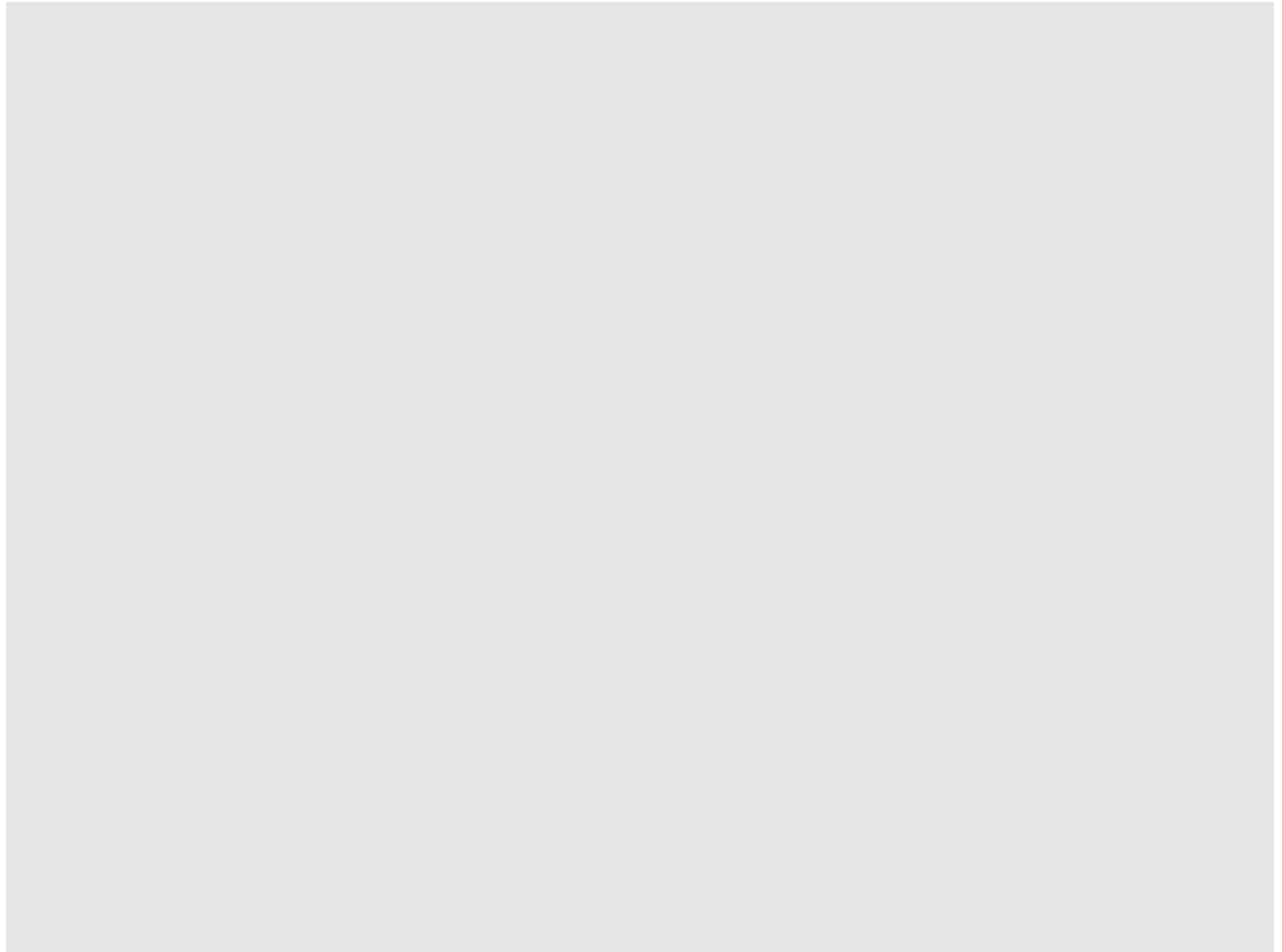


Rick Swearer, Howard Osterue and Keeney Swearer's proposed design for an information kiosk includes an electronic screen display and glass panels depicting the region's ecology. The kiosk, projected to be complete by September 2019, will sit on the corner of Sixth and Division Streets in front of Family Fare. (Photo courtesy of Northfield Public Library)

The proposed design is a four-sided kiosk that will feature a digital screen listing upcoming events or other information about downtown; the other three sides may include a map of the area, a business directory, locations of public art, etc. Keeney Swearer, an exhibit designer at Mackinac State Historic Park, will be mainly in charge of designing and implementing the display screen, which will eventually be updated remotely by staff from the Northfield Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Underneath a copper roof, a series of Rick Swearer's colored glass blocks will showcase the region's ecology, showing the river, local plants and animals. Adjustable lighting within the glass will illuminate the kiosk in different colors.

Though the project isn't anticipated to be complete until September 2019, Swearer is already at work casting the glass blocks with designs first carved into clay. As an artist often inspired by the local flora and fauna, he envisions the finished product as a landscape or still-life of the environment around it.



Artist Rick Swearer handles hot glass in his Northfield studio. Swearer has been working with glass art for over 25 years. (Anne Kopas/Northfield News)

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"The glass really lends itself to doing this kind of thing," said Swearer. "Since glass is sort of like water, the river theme is going to be fun to work with."

Swearer envisions kids walking up to the kiosk, seeing the plants and animals, and learning a thing or two while enjoying the art. Between the kiosk's stone base and ton of glass blocks, along with metalwork by Osterue (who has previously done metalwork for Tanzenwald Brewing and other downtown businesses), Swearer said the structure is designed to last at least a hundred years.

"I just hope it attracts people to the corner," said Swearer. "Glass is like a jewel, and it's going to be framed. You're going to put a jewel on top of a corner, which is kind of a strange corner."

Teresa Jensen, city arts and culture liaison, said the location was a strategic choice based on the city's goal of drawing people further down Division Street as businesses expand in that direction.

A smaller kiosk currently stands at the corner of Water and Fifth streets, but Jensen and other members of the city's Public Art Review Committee felt that there was a need for another, which created an opportunity to turn the project into a public work of art.

PUBLIC ART

More information about the city's public art projects will be posted at guides.mynpl.org/publicart as it becomes available.

The art team will receive a \$40,000 stipend for time and materials, which comes from the city's 2018 and 2019 street improvement project funds — 1 percent of each street improvement project is dedicated to the arts. This doesn't include the kiosk screen; the funding for that is still uncertain, said Jensen.

"It's going to be really a beautiful piece of art and a beautiful structure downtown," said Jensen. And since the money comes from the streets project, funded by tax dollars, she noted, "We wanted to make sure it would be of value to everyone."

The kiosk is the first project of the Public Art Review Committee — a group of city staff, local business owners and other Northfielders — which seeks to strategically integrate art into city projects, like the streets project.

For Swearer, the project is a return to the Northfield tradition of public art he remembers from the 1970s, a tradition that's being revived now with the kiosk and the library's downtown sculptures.

"You can't have too much art," he said.

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