

# Presidents uncovered

■ Statues will turn downtown Rapid City into "City of Presidents."

**By Bill Cissell**  
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Four former U.S. presidents were on hand in Rapid City

## Rapid City

Saturday morning and soon will be permanently stationed downtown.

Life-size statues of George Washington, John Adams, Ronald Reagan and George Bush were unveiled Saturday morning. The four bronze works are the first of 40 such pieces that eventually will grace the downtown street corners of Main and St. Joseph streets between Third and Ninth streets.

Four South Dakota-born artists will do the 40 works,

estimated to take 10 years to complete.

"Presidents are the center of American history," ceremony emcee Bill Wyatt noted. That is a fact, he said, quite evident this past week with the election of the 43rd president still undecided.

The statue concept is credited to Rapid City businessman Don Perdue.

"Ideas are a dime a dozen unless you can find good people to get behind them," Perdue said.

On Oct. 1, 1988, Gutzon Borglum's "Seated Lincoln" went on display in front of Hotel Alex Johnson. Perdue noted the overwhelming amount of interest in the work and believed there would be similar interest in other statues.

Perdue said that after meeting Dallerie Davis, a Rapid City Realtor and art promoter, he learned the works could be



Photos by Don Polovich/Journal staff

Jim Maher of Belle Fourche stands next to his sculpture of Ronald Reagan.

done by local artists.

"These are truly a moment in time that will never disappear," Perdue said at the unveiling.

Davis told the crowd of more than 100 that, "Today, you are a part of history. This will change the face of Rapid City."

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Four sculptures were unveiled Saturday in the Hotel Alex Johnson Ballroom. Above, Edward E. Hlavka of Sturgis stands next to his sculpture of George Bush. Above right, Lee Leuning of Pierre is shown with his likeness of George Washington. At right is John Lopez of Rapid City and John Adams.

# Statues: Third-largest art project

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Davis said the four current works eventually would be part of the third-largest art project in the state, behind only Mount Rushmore and Crazy Horse.

Pierre artist Lee Leuning, assisted by Sherri Treeby, took on the responsibility of sculpting the nation's first president.

Leuning, a South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks Department conservation officer, said, "This is about patriotism and a war hero."

Leuning also is working on the state's World War II memorial, to be placed on the Capitol grounds in Pierre.

Rapid City artist John Lopez, formerly of the Lemmon-Meadow area, didn't have to think much about which former leader he wanted to do. Lopez, through his mother's side of the family, is related to John Adams.

"President Adams was fun to do," Lopez said. He said he tried to pay attention to the dress of the period and make it as authentic as possible.

Lopez also will sculpt Adams' son, President John

Quincy Adams.

There always has been a spiritual theme to the works of Jim Maher of Belle Fourche, who did the Reagan statue, Davis said. "There is emotional depth and sincerity in (Maher's work)," she said.

"It is a privilege for me to do Ronald Reagan. I think he was one of our greatest presidents," Maher said. "He was one of our most genuine presidents. People could relate to him. That's what I wanted to bring out in this piece."

Sturgis native Ed Hlavka now calls St. George, Utah, home. In addition to creating the Bush statue, Hlavka is working on a sculpture of a mounted Col. Samuel D. Sturgis for that city and a Sundance Kid piece for that Wyoming community.

Hlavka said he thinks Bush exemplified public service.

Donors John Brewer and Rushmore Bank and Trust (Washington), Stan Adelstein (Adams), Chuck and Barbara Lien (Reagan) and Don and Joan Perdue (Bush) provided the \$50,000 per statue funding that got the project started.

The Reagan and Washington statues will be placed on the northwest and northeast corners of Sixth and St. Joe. Adams will stand watch over the southeast corner of Sixth and Main, and Bush will be on the northeast corner of that intersection.

Davis said, depending on the weather, three of the four statues could be placed as early as this week.

"Washington will go on the sidewalk pod in front of the Alex Johnson, but work on that area isn't yet complete," she said.

The next four works will be Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter.

The City of Presidents Foundation is the nonprofit organization behind the effort.