

Black Creek artisan finds success with garden works

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He applied to Community Futures for some funding and that body, recognizing the viability of what he was attempting, gave him the support he needed to get going.

Even more important, he says, was the unqualified support of Jann in what he was doing, Walker says.

"Jann is my business partner. She's a bookkeeper by profession, so that takes that pressure off me," he says. "She accompanies me to all the shows, and that's invaluable, because the shows are a lot of work. We've done about 25 shows so far, and there are more to come."

His Waterworks Sculptures aren't Walker's first kick at artistry in his life. One way or another he has been expressing his talents for years. He began a number of years ago as a photojournalist, an art photographer, as well as a stint as a photojournalism instructor at the University of Regina.

"It was kind of funny," he says. "I was the only person on the faculty who didn't have a degree. I didn't even have high school. I only went as far as part way through grade 10. But, I had other skills they wanted, so that was a very satisfying period in my life."

After he and Jann moved to Black Creek a few years ago, garden art became a passion. He had already studied sculpture under the tutelage of two sculptors he considers mentors, Dan Doyle in Calgary, and Gerry Ruecker in Regina.

"I was heavily influenced by them," he says. "I think the mentorship process is essential for an artist. We gain expertise from the influence of fine teachers, and then we head out on our own creative paths."

Walker's garden sculptures have truly taken off in the past few months, and are gaining considerable reputes well beyond the Comox Valley. A particular coup for him was being commissioned to create the fanciful weather station in the Tree House at the Capilano Suspension Bridge.

While Walker's larger pieces are not inexpensive, they are thoroughly unique and highly original, and with home gardens having become immensely popular, especially home gardens with a water aspect, Walker is

realizing sales he hadn't initially anticipated. His larger works can run as high as \$3,000. But, he also sells sculptures he calls his "bread and butter" creations, and they can be had for as little as \$370.

"They are a little more pricey now than they were in the beginning," he says. "That's because the price of copper has gone up 280 per cent in the past year."

So, where does Walker find the raw materials for his works? Well, he has many sources, ranging from junk sales to people's back closets.

"The musical instruments I find in pawnshops or hidden in the closets of school bandrooms," he says. "I got my first big cache of instruments from a repair shop in Nanaimo. The guy had 30 horns, and he said he would let me have them in exchange for a sculpture. I agreed."

The next few months will be busy ones for Walker. There is the big Bellevue WA Arts Festival at the end of July, for which he is currently preparing. The festival attracts upwards of 300,000 patrons. Then there is the Filberg at the beginning of August. He has also been invited to the San Francisco Flower and Garden Show in February next year.

■ Waterworks Garden Sculpture is located at 8138 Island Highway, Black Creek, and the public is welcome to visit the garden studio. Waterworks can also be found on the Internet at www.waterworksgardenart.com.

