Thank others, greater a tree a life and think ask not I could be fellow men. The common good dedicated to public servants

Thankful: I can read this if I am a real service to all challenge and there is no cause someone planted the care of human soul between the world and God. George H. W. Bush, who started my education and so my fellow Americans, I asked myself it could be worse. Roosevelt. If I were to remind myself it could be worse.

photo courtesy Andy Snow
Durimg my nearly 40 years in government, I was privileged to work with myriad people who dedicated themselves to public service for the common good.

They made sure the water was safe to drink. They arrested dangerous people. They ran into burning buildings and raced to get people to the emergency room. They inspected elevators and restaurants. They kept roads paved and mowed grass in parks. They gave vaccinations. They taught children. They saw that the law was carried out.

These are the people a new monument, “The Common Good,” honors and recognizes. Situated in Dayton’s Cooper Park, outside of the new downtown Dayton Metro Library, Jon Barlow Hudson’s striking 8-feet by 6-feet by 16-inches sculpture captures the spirit of public service. Carved out of Pennsylvania granite, the parabola’s passage way and seats are intended to demonstrate that there is always more than one perspective on how we govern ourselves and how to promote the common good. Those perspectives depend, in part, on where one sits.

Hudson, who lives in Yellow Springs and whose sculptures grace outdoor spaces in more than 20 countries and 10 states, also compels viewers to walk the circle that makes up his art. Thirteen quotations about the role of public service wrap around all four sides of the evocative piece.

“When the burdens of the presidency seem unusually heavy, I always remind myself it could be worse. I could be a mayor,” said President Lyndon B. Johnson, whose quip the sculpture memorializes.

Mayor Nan Whaley and Dayton City Commissioners Matt Joseph & Chris Shaw at the dedication.

Tim Riordan, former City Manager of Dayton
"The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life," said sociologist Jane Addams, a Nobel Peace Prize winner.

"Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth," said boxing legend Mohammad Ali.

Public service is a calling and a privilege. Our communities abound with public servants who have chosen essential careers, working selflessly, anonymously, diligently and often heroically, day in and day out. We shouldn’t ever forget that their professionalism, commitment and skills make our city, county, state, country and world a better place.
Four Dayton public servants commissioned and paid for “The Common Good” which rests outside the library in Cooper Park — the right place in a most apropos city. Daniel Cooper, an original Dayton settler and a founder, established Cooper Park “to be an open walk forever.” How fitting that today this sculpture sits in the City’s first community greens. How apt that it is here in Dayton, considering the city’s prominent place in the good government movement. (Dayton was the first large city to adopt the Council-Manager form of municipal government, putting professional qualifications above patronage.)

Hudson captures perfectly the sentiment that public servants are a community’s rock. Rather than decorative, the sculpture embodies an idea and the insight that achieving the common good requires listening and talking to one another. It communicates that democracy often requires circling back, reconsidering, even meandering to get things right. And the work reminds us that getting along and solving problems take recognizing the wisdom of those who came before us, acknowledging that sacrifice and compromise are essential to ensuring benefits for all.

The dedication occurred November 8. We should all take a minute to thank a public servant who’s keeping us safe, secure, healthy and ensuring that knowledge informs us all. Self-government is precious, but so are the many honorable public servants who put our will into action.

I attribute my interest in creating sculptures for public environments, in large part, to having grown up traveling round the world from a very young age and spending time with many ancient stone constructions: from Baalbek, Jerash, the Coliseum and Machu Pichu to Stonehenge and Chartre. The experience of them felt as if their builders were communicating down thru time with me, which is what I hope to do with my sculpture.

In order to communicate, which I think of art as doing, one must have something one is trying to share with the viewer, both in the present and in the future. So for me I have always been most interested in creating sculptures that embody an idea or insight, or experience that I hope to communicate, rather than be purely decorative or experimental or technique oriented.

My interest in this project to honor public service is that it is meaningful of the highest order. Without public service and public servants, we would not have culture or civilized and orderly society: there would be chaos.

Humans early on understood that in order to survive they had to work together in their tribe, which later evolved into clans, then into nations. They all had to work together toward “The Common Good” in order to succeed in providing food, health and civil and national safety. Today we need to think in terms of the global Common Good on “spaceship earth.” Thus, to have the honor to be able to create a sculpture, that will last for quite some time, dedicated to The Common Good and public service and servants, is one of the greatest and most meaningful purposes that my sculpture can be created for.

~ Jon Barlow Hudson

Tim Riordan formerly was the City Manager of Dayton.