

People from elsewhere come to see our town, how we decorate it and how we love it. Public art is a piece of all that.

THIS IS WHO WE ARE

BY ALLEN AND MARY DEE DODGE
PHOTOS BY JOEL RINER & DUSTIN WEED

When we travel, we want to see how others live. We sample their regional foods and enjoy their architecture, public spaces and local art.

We have never been to Venice, but we are intrigued by the fact that in the 1600s the city gave up its maritime industries to focus on tourism. The town set out to create public art in the form of sculpture, cathedrals, bridges and piazzas (not to mention a

few bones from martyred saints to attract religious pilgrims), transforming from Adriatic sea power to tourist mecca.

Coeur d'Alene is following a similar path. Our transition from logging town to lively arts community was born by the need to draw more paying visitors to this beautiful place. In the late 1960s, Art on the Green, our annual summer celebration, was launched and began attracting art tourists. The festival

grew tremendously during the '70s and '80s, encouraging other town festivals.

By the '90s, Coeur d'Alene passed the Percent-for-Arts statute, dedicating 1.33% of the cost of public building projects to artwork. Today, aware that art is good for business, the Lake City Development Corporation supports public art with tax increment financing. Most importantly, we have developed a broad base of avid arts patrons. From symphony and opera to theater, galleries, workshops and street sculpture, our town is alive with well-attended creativity.

Visitors from everywhere walk along Sherman Avenue and stop to check out the ever-changing street sculptures from the

Art Currents project. Parents plant their kids on Muddy the Moose for a photo op, then head off to sit in the bronze heart at the Chamber of Commerce building. Children are crazy for the fireman's hat on 15th street. The new Coeur d'Alene Public Library incorporates art on every level, and the Education Corridor at North Idaho College offers more than a dozen public artworks with more on the way.

Our decorated utility boxes have sparked a nationwide trend. Unusual bike racks and benches embellish city streets. Many parks feature chainsaw-carved wooden creatures while McEuen Park is a gigantic piece of public art unto itself. We don't have any saber-wielding generals on horseback, but we do have Terry Lee's fine bronze Tribute to the Working Man.

Allen and Mary Dee Dodge met and married at the Kansas City Art Institute in 1973, quickly moved to Coeur d'Alene and have been involved in the art world here since then. They've been writers, cartoonists, muralists, potters, sculptors, painters and are now making porcelain enamels and welded steel creatures. Their work can be seen around town and at The Art Spirit Gallery.



Artist: Allen & Mary Dee Dodge

Coeur d'Alene architecture offers another sense of public art. The Hagadone office building on the lake west of the hotel is a wonderful example of regional style, further enhanced by its iron gates created by Spokane artist Harold Balazs. Sherman Avenue sports many well-restored facades. A walk through the neighborhoods near downtown affords the opportunity to see many 'carpenter gothic' homes, with woodcraft that is exceptional yet simple.

Controversy in public art isn't a thing to be avoided, but rather, embraced. As with all

art, there is something for each individual. Real, abstract, humorous or dark, it goes beyond like and dislike. The more diverse the public artwork, the better represented each way of thinking and the more interesting our community.

People from elsewhere come to see our town, how we decorate it and how we love it. Public art is a piece of all that. It's not only a draw, an economic addition, but it's one of the many ways we celebrate the beauty of this place, one of the ways we say, "This is who we are." CdA

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