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Ron Baird

Sculptor

Interview by Wendy Chiavalon

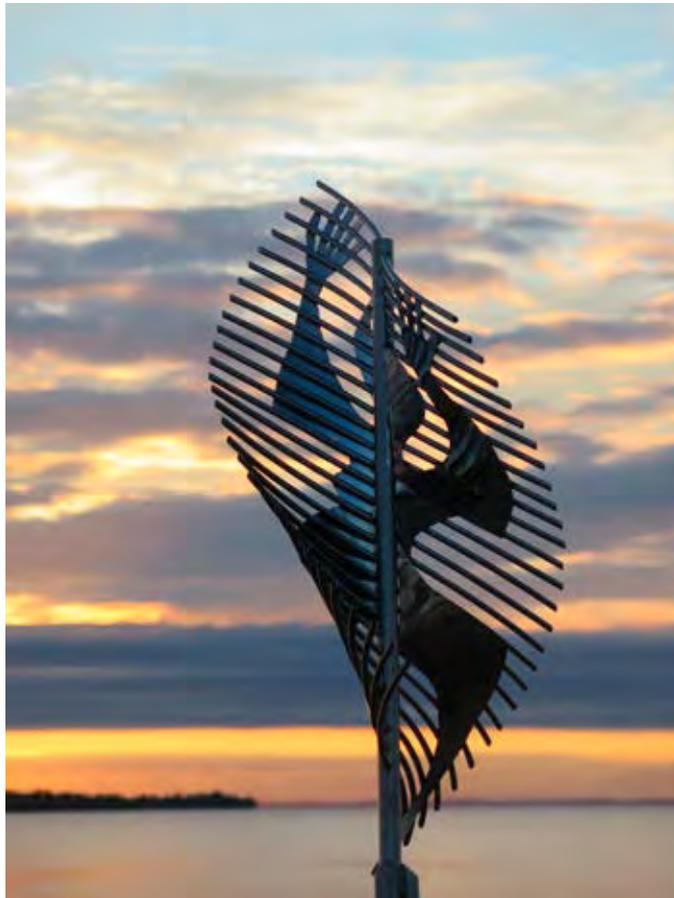
Ron Baird, a long-time Durham resident, is one of Canada's most successful sculptors having created over 300 public, corporate and private commissions. His works celebrate the accomplishments of others and our great country.

Dedicated to emergency workers, the generosity of donors,

Canadian peace-keeping efforts, honouring our history-makers, our First Nations, celebrating our multicultural diversity, his works are in many public parks, churches, synagogues, subway entrances, community centres, libraries, and government buildings, not only in Ontario, but also across Canada.

I recently had the opportunity to chat with Ron Baird about his life and his work. In his own words, here is his story...

My passion for making sculpture was ignited when I first viewed an exhibition of contemporary British sculptors in 1960 at the AGO which was then called The Art Gallery of Toronto. All the great English sculptors of the mid-century were included and it was a life altering experience for me. My ambition to become an industrial designer switched that day to becoming a sculptor. Experimenting with sculpture seemed a lot more fun than designing products and



packages.

When I graduated from The Ontario College of Art in '64 I was appointed to the position of resident sculptor at the University of Toronto's School of Architecture and was subsequently invited to teach design to the students. This really developed my interest in sculpture in the context of architecture.

The 1960's were an exciting decade in Canada, the mood was positive, people were creative, daring and happy to move in new directions. Montreal was host to one of the greatest world's fairs, the much-lauded EXPO '67. I was very fortunate to be commissioned to create 9 large sculptures for Eric Arthur's Man in the Community Courtyard. I resigned my teaching job, moved to Clarendon and built a studio to do the work. Things were easy in those days, 5 acres on Duffins Creek with a tiny house cost me \$12,500. The taxes were \$80/year. Ahh, the good ol' days!

That was the studio where I built what was then the world's tallest steel sculpture in 1969 which still stands on Dufferin Street in North York outside the Atmosphere Canada building. But, the house and studio are gone, sacrificed to the proposed Pickering airport in '72.

For the past dozen years, I have been working mainly in stainless steel, chosen for its durability and beauty. I love the way the polished surface reflects the sky, the grass, the people, the snow. I have executed over 300 sculpture commissions which can be found in government buildings, parks, hospitals and courtyards across Canada. I also have large scale works in the USA and the UK. I am currently building a piece for the building that houses the Norwegian embassy in Sri Lanka. We are looking forward to that trip this fall.

Sky Woman is the title of the 12-meter-high kinetic sculpture I proposed to the Beaverton Special Events Committee (www.skywomanbeaverton.com). Sky Woman is a first Nations creation story of the woman who fell from the heavenly realm when the earth was covered in water. Canada geese carried her safely down to the turtle's back and muskrats carried mud from the sea bottom to the turtles back which then grew into Turtle Island which is North America. Otsi'tsaka:yon touched down and spread the first seeds in what is now Beaverton harbour, the proposed site for the sculpture. A model of Sky Woman is undergoing wind tunnel testing. I have a special interest in this project because my artist wife Sarah Cowley and I have made our home in Beaverton for the past ten years.

Durham region is home to a few of my pieces, early works at the Robert McLaughlin Art Gallery, three more are included in Stouffville's sculpture walk, five in Uxbridge and one in Oshawa's city hall.

I was honoured to be one of just 30 Sculptors in the world chosen to exhibit my work in the prestigious Venice Biennale 2018. My show is in a palace on the Grand Canal. The Palazzo Bembo is just steps away from the famous Rialto bridge. While we were there for the opening celebrations we went kayaking in the canal with family... we all scrubbed our hands when we got back.

To learn more about Ron, visit his personal website: www.RonBairdArtist.com.

Wendy Chiavalon is the Editor-In-Chief of The Local Biz Magazine.