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In Defense of Artists

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A master sand blaster creating one of the obelisks for the Radnor Gateways Enhancement Project.

Photo: William P. Reimann

I am concerned that the otherwise excellent articles honoring the Radnor Gateway Enhancement Project (*Places* 12.2) seem to have minimized the work of the artist, William Reimann.

Reimann's work, from myriad sketches that indicated the use and placement of stones and objects, to the design of a town seal, and the ultimate proliferation of that seal's design components in various ways, should be more openly acknowledged.

An artist's work often is critical in the first stages of a project. Reimann's involvement began early in the Radnor project when, based on his experience and reputation as a sculptor in the private sector, he was engaged to inspect the highway site and the township and to propose design concepts and sculptural work that could be implemented successfully.

It was apparent early on that the construction of the highway was creating mountains of rock refuse that would have to be disposed of without negative impact on the site or its neighbors. Recognizing the significance of stones in the history of a town settled by people of Welsh and British ancestry, Reimann realized that many of the larger pieces of rock could be utilized in building a series of evocative works, such as cairns and other stone elements.

Reimann also developed a motif for the other aspect of the project, a design around which the project and townspeople could coalesce. Intrigued by the commercial seal used on police cars of Radnor Township, Reimann redesigned the seal as a work of art. The elements of that design—a lion, a Conestoga wagon, a sheaf of wheat, a griffin and the tree of life—are reflected on the unusually decorative sound barriers above two freeway overpasses, a large, carved obelisk and a remarkable stone griffin on a highway embankment.

Various elements are tributes not only to Reimann's artistic ingenuity but also to his involvement with the construction of the project. The griffin resulted from collaboration with the engineers who helped to position spawls of limestone within the pattern outline. Reimann also directed bulldozer and crane operators in the artistic placement of the stones that constitute the cairn so that they would be returned to the site in a uniquely apt fashion.

Perhaps, in the last analysis, we should applaud the project director, Ronald Lee Fleming, for having the vision and taste to choose artists of Reimann's stature in creating living space that becomes part of the collective conscious of residents and passers-by.

Ann M. Courtright is a research assistant to William P. Reimann.