

The Times Argus
Talk of the Town
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Under wraps

BARRE — The large tarp in front of City Place is covering something very Barre that will be on display for all to see in a little less than a week.

What is it?

Well, regular readers may recall that some of the money that former Barre businessman Charlie Semprebon left the city following his death in 2009 was used to underwrite what has been dubbed the “Stone Sculpture Legacy Program.” The money will be used to commission public sculptures that will be strategically located throughout downtown Barre, underscoring the community’s long-standing reputation as the “Granite Center of the World.”

The recently completed first installment, a piece of work called “Coffee Break,” is currently cloaked by the tarp and is just waiting to be seen.

It won’t have to wait much longer.

Created by local sculptor Heather Ritchie, “Coffee Break” — a tip of the cap to Barre’s blue-collar roots — will officially be unveiled in front of City Place next Wednesday at 4 p.m.

The sparsely elegant sculpture recreates idle stone blocks waiting to be shaped where workers in the local granite industry set down their cutters tools, lunch pails, and coffees for a scheduled break.

Ritchie’s clay model was pretty impressive and we’re told the finished product, which is sited on a raised platform covered with a granite surface (and, for the next few days, a tarp), is even more so.

Four blocks of stone are arranged in a horseshoe shape that will encourage people to enter the space and interact with the sculptures. The blocks of exposed granite showcase the natural beauty of the stone and will invite viewers to rest on the blocks, touch the life-sized tools on the stone surfaces, and consider the work ethic of the men and women toiling in local sheds.

That, Ritchie says, was her inspiration.

“We do what we know,” she says. “After working in the sheds five years, I searched through memories for what most embodied the proposal theme (Barre’s blue-collar work ethic). I kept feeling that the bonds that I made during coffee break — the laughing, talking and camaraderie — made me want to recreate my experience.”

And that is precisely what she did after a panel of regional art experts chose her blind entry in

August of 2012, launching the Semprebon-funded program that will support the creation of several public sculptures over the next few years.

Coordinator Sue Higby, who also serves as executive director of Studio Place Arts, proposed the program in hopes of positioning Barre as a regional, creative force and fostering a groundswell of community pride. The Stone Sculpture Legacy Program, underwritten by the Semprebon Fund, will support the creation of a group of sculptures to be sited in downtown Barre over a period of 5-6 years.

“Barre’s historic development was linked to its talented visual artists and stoneworkers,” says Higby. “Our worldwide reputation will be enhanced through a program that brings greater attention to our uniquely talented, blue collar heroes.”