

Local sculptor delivers Sir Barre

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Jeb Wallace-Brodeur / Staff Photo

Barre sculptor Giuliano Cecchinelli examines his granite statue of Col. Isaac Barre before delivering it to City Hall on Wednesday.

BARRE — Giuliano Cecchinelli went for a long walk with Sir Isaac Barre on Wednesday, though the two men never spoke before parting company at City Hall.

Barre — at least, the granite version of the man for whom the city was named after a storied fistfight back in 1793 — is still there.

Cecchinelli — the immigrant Italian sculptor who was commissioned in 2012 to complete an “in the round” statue of the man widely credited with first describing American Colonists as “Sons of Liberty” during his days in the British Parliament — isn’t.

After making a very special but unexpected delivery to City Hall, Cecchinelli, 71, took his handcart and his bungee cords and headed back to Buttura & Gherardi Granite Artisans on Boynton Street.

Not, Cecchinelli said, before swinging by Studio Place Arts to tell Executive Director Sue Higby that, after two years of on-again-off-again work, his contribution to the city’s Stone Sculpture Legacy Program was finally done.

Done, but not finished, according to the man with the wild, wiry hair, the twinkling eyes, and the hands that dance whenever he talks.

“If the piece is in my sight it’s never finished,” Cecchinelli explained during a Wednesday morning interview at the Buttura & Gherardi plant.

At the time, the nearly 4-foot-tall, 300-plus-pound statue of Barre hadn’t yet been delivered, though Cecchinelli, a meticulous and admittedly impulsive man, was seriously considering personally rolling it to City Hall if and when the spirit moved him.

“Maybe tomorrow, maybe the next week. . . . Who knows?” he said. “I go by the way I feel. I do things out of impulse.”

That he does, because shortly after the interview ended he decided to strap his statue to a handcart and roll it over to City Hall.

“I just put it on the cart and went,” he said of an unscripted event that fittingly occurred on the opening day of the Barre Heritage Festival.

“I don’t premeditate anything,” said Cecchinelli, an old-school sculptor, who isn’t a fan of public unveilings and wasn’t looking for any “pats on the back” for simply doing what he promised.

“To me, it’s no big deal,” he said. “I did what I said I would do, simple as that.”

However, there was nothing simple about the statue of Barre that now stands inside the entrance to City Hall, according to Higby, who didn’t see the finished product until Friday but was impressed by the level of detail when she last checked Cecchinelli’s progress several weeks ago.

“I had goose bumps,” she recalled. “I knew he had created a masterpiece and that I was in the presence of greatness.”

Higby, who secured funding for the sculpture program from some of the money Barre businessman Charlie Sempregon left the city at his death in 2009, has volunteered to manage the project that is designed to underwrite public sculpture produced by local artisans, like Cecchinelli.

According to Higby, the piece honoring Sir Isaac Barre was suggested by Sen. Bill Doyle, R-Washington, and initially conceived as a bas relief. However, Cecchinelli agreed to carve a head-to-toe statue that he executed in jaw-dropping detail.

“It’s really complicated and so explicit,” she said, noting the figure is holding a scroll — a nod to Sir Isaac’s oratorical abilities — and even took into account his glass right eye that was the result of a war wound.

“(Cecchinelli) has delivered a magnificent work of art, and it is going to be something that many, many generations will enjoy,” she said.

Cecchinelli delivered the statue in more ways than one, turning heads during a several block

walk that he wouldn't have trusted to anyone else.

"If I do it, I break it, it's (me) to blame," he said.

According to Cecchinelli, when he passed Trow & Holden Co. on South Main Street, proprietor Norm Akley stepped out to ask if he needed a hand, and Karen Lane, director of the Aldrich Public Library, offered him a ride back to Buttura & Gherardi after he'd completed his mission.

"They wanted to help, but to me ... this was something I could do," he said.

Born in Carrara, Italy, Cecchinelli came to the United States in 1961, settling in Vermont where he worked as a sculptor for Vermont Marble Co. in Proctor before moving to Barre and taking a job at Buttura's in 1965.

"I came here and I'm still here 50 years later," he said, noting his newly delivered statue didn't have any special significance to him.

"The people of Barre, they're the ones that should enjoy it," he said.

Now they can because Cecchinelli's work is done, even if he maintains it will never be finished.

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