

EDITORIAL

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Source of pride

Starting next week, Studio Place Arts in Barre will host its 15th annual showcase of stone sculptures by area artists. The exhibit pays tribute to the craftsmanship and skill that have come to define this community for generations.

We do not have to go far to know Barre's legacy is truly rock solid, as the show's name implies.

In recent weeks and months we have seen repeated examples of the granite industry making a difference here — and in notable ways elsewhere.

Locally, industry leaders with long ties to community building have come forward not only to assist in the installation of some notable sculptures and artwork, but in improving and reinforcing the steps to the beloved Aldrich Public Library. In a matter of weeks, the front steps will have been recut and reset, and a statue of Charles Dickens' character Mr. Pickwick standing atop books by local carver Giuliano Cecchinelli will grace the library's lawn. At the rear of the library, too, a new granite bike stand will be installed to complement the Main Street gargoyles that watch over bikes in that part of town.

There's so much to see, so many things to enjoy about the Granite City's namesake, that an art tour is being scheduled to coincide with the SPA show. Like Hope Cemetery nearby, our city is becoming a museum in its own right.

Then there was the news recently that various entities within Barre's tight-knit granite industry came together to ensure a contract could be completed to replace the limestone steps and exterior entryway to the north portico of the White House with Barre Gray. It was an impressive job that made headlines, and the news was shared on social media across the globe. People with even the most tangential ties to Barre were proud to say the work done at the nation's house came from their "hometown."

We look around our city, and across central Vermont, and we see countless examples of the talent (some going back 150 years) that the rest of the world has come to covet. We often hear about these notable — and often amazing — projects only after they have been packed up, carefully placed on trucks and then hauled hither and yon.

Once upon a time, in the city's heyday, there was constant chatter about what the various sheds and carvers were working on. It was a rivalry, for certain, and it was spirited in its competitiveness, but many of granite workers came together at the end of the day or week to break bread or raise glasses together. It was part of the tradition.

Somewhere along the way, perhaps when trade secrets started to spread competition to other

countries, local contracts became proprietary and fewer and fewer people could celebrate in the successes etched or carved forever into Barre Gray and other stones.

That's unfortunate.

What sometimes seems to get lost to some of the people running the local granite industry is that those of us outside the sheds really are proud of the work being done here. We like to know what is lifted from our hillsides, shaped and shipped all over the world. In fact, nearly every time a carver and his or her project is featured on these pages, the ripple effect is exponential on social media, in requests for reprints and in the chatter on the street.

The people who make up our granite industry have been, are and should be held up and celebrated. They should not be taken for granted. Not many of us can say that our work will last into the future, and even fewer of us can say that our products will stand the test of time itself.

We are blessed to have such devoted and gifted people leaving their mark. Compared with the rest of the world, the work done here is as black is to white. Or, more aptly, Barre Gray.