The Sculpture Project Celebrates the Completion of Its First Statue and Begins Fundraising Efforts for Its Second

Manchester, CT. The Sculpture Project announces the commencement of fundraising efforts for its second in a series of three life size bronze statues of notable Manchester citizens.

The first statue, that of Joe McCluskey, Olympic Medalist and four time Manchester Road Race winner, was dedicated on Nov. 11, 2019. Joe is depicted in full stride. The statue is located along the Charter Oak/East Coast Greenway in the parklet on the corner of Wyllys and Highland Streets. Just over $88,000 was raised to fund the statue from donations by individuals, corporations and businesses as well as grants. “We are proud that our first statue was made possible by contributions both large and small. We look forward to a similar broad base of support for our next statue: Elisabeth M. Bennet.” says Sculpture Project Chair, Lynn Sottile.

Ms. Bennet’s statue will stand on the grounds of Bennet Academy close to the corner of Main and School Streets.

The Sculpture Project Committee is excited to begin to share the story of Elisabeth M. Bennet, educator, innovator and heroine. Born in Danbury Connecticut in 1881, Ms. Bennet pursued a career in education earning a degree from New Britain Teacher’s College and a master’s degree from Massachusetts State Teacher’s College. She began her long career in Manchester, arriving in 1909 as supervisor and principal of the Ninth District School. In 1917 she became principal of Barnard School. 1945 saw the addition of supervision responsibilities for Nathan Hale, Barnard, Highland Park and South Schools to her principal duties.

During her tenure Ms. Bennet introduced innovative teaching aids and enrichment programs to the Manchester schools. She was the first to establish a school library, the first to promote a manual training program, the first to use movie projectors as visual classroom aides and was credited with promoting the first recreational center.

1913 saw Ms. Bennet’s most dramatic contribution. When a fire raged through the Ninth District School, Ms. Bennet is credited with saving over 1,000 students and teachers by ensuring that all safely exited the school. She was injured in the fire which destroyed the school. In 1961 Barnard Junior High was renamed the Elisabeth M. Bennet Middle School in her honor.

The exciting and challenging task of creating the image of Ms. Bennet that will be used for her life-size bronze statue has begun. Sculpture Michael Keropian, who sculpted the Joe McCluskey statue, is developing the pose that will be used. Photos of Ms. Bennet are few and far between. Members of the public who may have photos are encouraged to contact Lynn Sottile at Schultz.design@snet.net.

The Sculpture Project would also like to gather reminiscences from students of Ms. Bennet or their family members. These memories would be very helpful in lending depth and additional detail that will help us to tell Elisabeth’s story in bronze and through writing. Individuals who may have this information may contact Lynn Sottile at Schultz.design@snet.net.

We encourage those that would like to support the legacy of Ms. Bennet to make a contribution to The Sculpture Project c/o The Manchester Historical Society, 75 Pine Street, Manchester, CT 06040. All donations are tax deductible.

For more information on the Sculpture Project please go to manchesterhistory.org and find us on Facebook.