



HOME / FLYING CHAMELEON FINDS CITY HOME

# Flying chameleon finds city home

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District 1 city councilman Ty Wolosin and his daughters, Clementine, left, and Rosalyn admire the flying chameleon sculpture earlier this week. Star photo by Crystal Henry

The city of Boerne recently adopted a colorful flying chameleon named Skittles to be a permanent resident of the city through the Art Al Fresco public art sculpture competition.

With a unanimous vote, city council members approved the purchase of the new sculpture currently located at the trailhead to the amphitheater by the Patrick Heath Public Library outside the Friends of the Library bookstore. The whimsical reptile is set to move sometime in March to its new location outside the Boerne Convention and Visitors Bureau.

“It’s a large piece, very bright and colorful,” said Danny Zincke, director of community services for the city.

Zincke said the sculpture competition is a nationwide call for artists designed to grow Boerne’s public art collection.

The entries are evaluated, selected and displayed throughout the city, and in the end the city has the chance to purchase one or more pieces.

And while none of Boerne's local artists entered a piece, there were several Texas artists who applied. Skittles is the work of Austin artist GiGi Miller.

"We'd love to have some local artists put some pieces in," Zincke said.

But Boerne Special Projects Manager Mary Woods said a lot of the local sculptors work with bronze, and because the metal is so expensive they don't have a lot of extra pieces lying around to enter. She said bronze sculptures are also expensive to purchase and that many start at about \$50,000.

"But we absolutely would love Boerne artists to participate in this," Woods said.

Skittles originally was priced at \$25,000. However, Boerne Special Projects Director Paul Barwick said program directors negotiated a price reduction to \$20,000. The original source of funding for the piece was \$15,000 from the FY20 public art capital budget and \$5,000 of reallocated funds the special projects department had from scaling back the Dickens on Main celebration.

However, hearing public concern about pulling money from the general fund, Barwick suggested using funds from hotel occupancy tax revenue.

"It does, in my opinion, add a uniqueness to Boerne," District 1 Councilman Ty Wolosin said. Wolosin moved to approve the resolution by amending that \$15,000 come from the hotel occupancy tax revenue and \$5,000 come from the general fund. He also suggested reaching out to local business owners and private philanthropists to give them the opportunity to purchase other pieces from the competition.

District 5 Councilman Joe Macaluso agreed that using hotel occupancy tax fund money made sense to pay for something that will also serve as a tourism draw.

Barwick's presentation showed the number of voters in the competition who were from outside Boerne was more than double that of city residents. Macaluso motioned the full \$20,000 come from the hotel occupancy tax fund. The motion passed unanimously.

"I think that's a reasonable way to pay for that," Macaluso said.

Voting this year included an online ballot as well as paper ballots in 13 locations throughout the downtown area, Barwick said. The sculptures were scattered throughout the city with four at the library, one at the visitor's center, two at the trailhead near Peggy's on the Green, one at the Curry Creek trailhead and two at City Park.

Skittles received the largest number of votes from city residents, and was recognized as "Boerne's Choice."

Out of 672 voters, only 200 were from Boerne. Voters were allowed to vote for more than one sculpture, and out of 1,139 total votes, Boerne residents cast 418. Of those 418 local votes, Skittles received 30.62 percent, which is almost 12 percent higher than the nearest competitor – an antelope-type bronze sculpture called "Sitatunga."

Skittles is a 1,500-pound reinforced-concrete sculpture with handmade ceramic tiles and plasma cut steel.

"It's a very durable piece," Barwick said.

Woods said Skittles is not only beautiful from afar, but it's an interesting piece to study closely as some of the tiles have symbols on them. It is the fourth installation from the Art Al Fresco competition, which has been operating since 2015.

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