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Title: CAN-do! - A sprinkling of creativity to help a garden grow
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First came life-size replica cows scattered about the streets of Chicago, which successfully attracted more tourists and their dollars.

Then came whimsical dog sculptures in Haverford and Bryn Mawr, created as a fund-raiser for the Main Line Arts Center in 2002. A year later, more than 150 plaster mules were displayed along the Delaware and Lehigh Canal corridor. Now, in a similar fund-raising vein, a collection of gigantic watering cans comes to a little-known botanical garden in Devon.

Thirty-seven watering cans, each an original piece of art selected by a jury, are now on display at the Jenkins Arboretum just off Berwyn Baptist Road.

Each is four feet high. Some are painted with scenes of wildlife, others depict magical creatures from fairy tales or fantasy. The works of art appeared together for the first time yesterday under a tent in a wooded clearing.

This summer, they'll be placed amid the 46 acres of flora and fauna as a sculpture garden. In the fall, they'll be auctioned off to pay for the garden's new education center.

The watering-can theme symbolizes nurturing and growth and the arboretum's plan for expanding its facilities, said Harold E. Sweetman, the arboretum's director.

Each artist started with an identical, blank, fiberglass watering can, but the end result is as different as the visions of the 37 artists themselves. The 37 cans on display were selected from 110 designs submitted to the arboretum.

En-I Foo, a Bryn Mawr resident and amateur painter, turned his watering can into a portrait of the peony tree, which grows in China. He painted a pink blossom with green leaves on a pale yellow background.

Foo, 65, who holds a doctorate in physics and displays his paintings on the walls of his Hu-Nan Restaurant in Ardmore, embraced the project as soon as he learned of it.

"I really wanted to do the dog sculptures, but I didn't pursue it," said Foo, referring to the Main Line Art Center's "Art Unleashed" project that raised more than \$300,000 in 2002. "But this one, I'm really excited about."

Chicago's "Cows on Parade" project put 320 differently painted cow sculptures on city streets during the summer of 1999. The million visitors who came spent freely, and the city garnered national publicity.

"Miles of Mules" generated money to maintain the old Delaware-Lehigh canal corridor and various Delaware Valley museums.

The arboretum is hoping for its own attendance bump and extra funds. Those who do come won't see just the work of grown-ups.

Sarah Lammer, a Lower Merion High School sophomore, made her can an orange and yellow striped cat, with the spout as tail and sharp teeth threatening from the handle.

Others called her work, "the tiger," but Lammer, 15, disagreed. "It's just a kitty cat," said the student from Narberth. "His name is Oscar."

Christina Haines turned hers into a canvas for her button collection. It took her 100 hours to press each one into the clear silicone glue.

"My mom tried to count the buttons on the spout. She got to 200 and then gave up," said Haines, 16, also a sophomore at Lower Merion High School. Haines guessed that the work contained more than 6,000 buttons.

Haines and Lammer entered the contest as part of a class assignment.

Samantha Knapp of Devon produced whimsical renderings of plants in the daylight on one side of her watering can, with the night sky on the other. The latter shows the moon as a boy, the sun as a girl.

"He's kind of flirting with her, and she's all, like, blushing," said Knapp, 19, who graduated from Conestoga High School in 2005 and hopes to attend art school.

The nonprofit arboretum opened in 1976. It was created from the former property of H. Lawrence and Elisabeth Phillippe Jenkins, who bequeathed the land for use as a free public park and site for study and learning.

Over the past 30 years, the grounds have been culled to showcase native Pennsylvania plants. Specialties are azaleas and rhododendrons. Each plant is mapped and catalogued.

The cans will soon be dispersed throughout the arboretum's grounds.

"It's like hanging a show," said Sweetman, who has been at Jenkins Arboretum for 20 years. "You have to display the cans in the right settings. The one that looks like bark will go into a woodland. The ones with water, the lily pads, will go near the pond."

On Sept. 23, the watering cans will be moved to Valley Forge Military Academy and College in Wayne, where they'll be auctioned off as part of a gala by a representative from Sotheby's of New York.

Sweetman expects to feel a bit down after that happens.

"They're going to leave," he said, "and we're going to miss them."

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