

FINE ARTS

Merchants invite ice carvers to chill out to heat up sales

Brr ... bear:
This bear carving for the Plymouth International Ice Sculpture Spectacular was created by Nicholas Watts of Plymouth.



By LINDA CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

More and more local development authorities and shopping districts are looking to ice carving as a way to draw customers into stores. This year alone Birmingham, Royal Oak, Rochester, and Plymouth will host events varying from simple showcases of the art to competitions with demonstrations by carvers.

Sponsored by the Birmingham Principal Shopping District, Winterfest is an exhibition of ice sculptures including a 10-block Victorian house. It takes place Thursday, Feb. 5, to Sunday, Feb. 8, in two locations: the Triangle area where Woodward and Old Woodward converge, and Shain Park, north of Merrill, east of Bates in downtown Birmingham. For more information, call (248) 433-3650.

"The idea is to bring people into the downtown area," said Dawn Booker, special events coordinator for the Birmingham Principal Shopping District. "This is our 14th year. It started off as a family fun event by The Community House. At one time it was a competition that evolved into a spectator sport which is now tied in with merchants in a sales event."

The Rochester Downtown Development Authority is gambling their first ice carving event, "No Ordinary Sale," will bring customers into the area 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday, Jan. 30, and until 6 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 31. For more information, call (248) 656-0060.

"We'd talked for several years about doing something involving ice at the beginning of the year when sales are slow," said Kristina Trevarrow, Rochester DDA



Carver at work: An Oakland Community College student works on his ice sculpture in Kellogg Park at the Plymouth International Ice Sculpture Spectacular.

promotions and marketing coordinator. "We're starting small with sculptures in front of the businesses and five major pieces scattered throughout the site. If it's well accepted we'll talk about expanding it next year."

Carver J. R. Lorentz, with his

partner Alison Edwards, is producing the sculptures for the Rochester event. The 35-year-old, Garden City resident is rare among carvers in that he pays his bills with his skills. Lorentz works full time in a Plymouth studio creating everything from custom carvings to company logos. The majority of carvers work as chefs and instructors and carve to supplement their income.

"I like to say I've got the coolest job around," said Lorentz. "A lot of people tend to do it as a hobby or as a money maker on the side, but I love it so much I do it full time. I work together with catering companies frequently but compete against the floral market. But with an endless variety of subjects and the different ways I can light a carving, it can be a focal point for any occasion. They also can be functional as well as aesthetic."

Weddings, bridal showers, anniversaries, banquets, parties, Lorentz can carve something appropriate from the one block sculptures weighing in at 250 pounds and standing four feet tall for just about any occasion. The cost ranges from \$175 to \$225.

And how long does a carving usually last before turning into a puddle? Lorentz estimates six to eight hours depending on conditions.

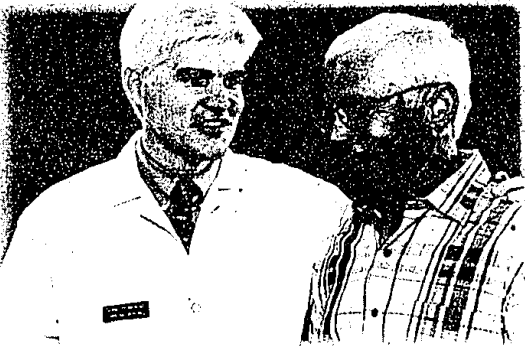
From cars to art

A graduate of Garden City West High School, Lorentz came to ice carving after working in the collision business for more than 10 years. It was then he decided to go for an associate degree in culinary arts at Henry Ford Community College in Dearborn where he was president of the Ice Carving Club. Lorentz graduated in 1995. Two years ago, he founded J.R.'s Ice Sculptures, a full-service company which supplies sculptures, ice punchbombs, and carving blocks in the tri-county area.

Over the last year, Lorentz won several professional competitions including third place in the Plymouth Ice Spectacular with team mate Matt Cooper of Fenton. On Friday, Feb. 6, Lorentz will defend the first place he took in the Great Lakes Ice Carving Competition in Frankfort.

Lorentz and Jim Bur Jr. won the title as a team in 1997. Lorentz's dream is to compete in the 2002 Winter Olympics Ice Sculpting Competition just as carvers Ted Wakar of Canton and Bur, an Eastpointe resident who grew up in Livonia and graduated from Churchill High School, will do this year in Nagano, Japan.

Linda Ann Chomin is an arts reporter for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. If you have an interesting idea for a story involving the visual or performing arts, call her at (313) 953-2145.



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