

Sculptor recreates American icon -- again

Sergio Furnari

BY DANIEL P. TUCKER

Queens-based sculptor Sergio Furnari has stayed afloat during the recession by working on projects abroad.

However, Furnari got another chance to create an American icon on American soil when an Indiana restaurateur commissioned a remake of his sculpture of 11 life-size ironworkers eating lunch on a beam during the construction of Rockefeller Center. The sculpture is based on a 1932 photograph.

"Those 11 guys, they have a soul," said Furnari, 40. "When I saw the photo, I knew I could capture their soul and give them life."

The sculpture will be installed on top of a 1920s-themed restaurant in Valparaiso, Indiana called Industrial Revolution, which is set to open in February 2010. In September, the owner stumbled upon Furnari's web site, where he discovered that the artist's sculpture matched their design concept. The restaurant is meant to glorify American ingenuity and serve a helping of national pride alongside its burgers, pizza, and Cobb salads.

"The concept is a tribute to the people who build and protect our country. Our slogan is 'saluting America's greatness,'" said owner Mike Leeson, 36. "We want people to leave there knowing that America is still the land of the free and the home of the brave."

The restaurant will be outfitted with 30 flat-screen TVs that will periodically flash inspirational and motivational quotes. The soundtrack will be 1920s jazz and big band music. There will even be a miniature steam engine moving around the dining room on a track suspended two feet below the ceiling. The idea is to inspire pride in the patrons.

Furnari also sold the restaurateur his original 11-man sculpture, which had been on top of his pick-up truck for the last seven years. In 2002, it was on display at the World Trade Center site for five months.

Furnari made less than he wanted to from the sale but was happy to have the business.

"Whatever I used to sell, I would say, for \$50,000 five years ago, now I got to be super-happy if I get \$25,000," he said.

He has always been proud of the men in his sculpture whom he described as everyday heroes. Some critics have told him that the sculpture will not have a lasting impact, but Furnari disagrees.

"How can American history fade away?" Furnari said. "Impossible. It will never, ever fade away."

The weekend before Thanksgiving, the owner of Industrial Revolution flew to New York to inspect and purchase the sculptures. He then drove them back to Indiana in a U-Haul truck.

Furnari and his team of five workers created the sculptures in an ironworking shop in Long Island City in October and November. They used wire mesh, newspaper, Quikrete® cement, and epoxy to create the bodies, heads, arms and legs. Then they dressed the sculptures in clothes from the Salvation Army, spray painted them, and sanded them to look like stainless steel. The final touches were put on in an



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Photos by Daniel P. Tucker

Sculptor Sergio Furnari poses with a figure. This particular statue was modeled to look like Furnari.



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Sergio Furnari's sculptures are loaded into a U-Haul truck that the restaurateur will drive back to Indiana.

unused garage in Jersey City.

When the restaurateur arrived in Jersey City to inspect the sculptures, he was impressed.

"If you didn't know anything about Sergio or the Industrial Revolution, but you drive by a restaurant with those 11 guys up there, you're gonna go there," Leeson said.