

PRESS RELEASE

Whale Project receives major grant from Rasmuson Foundation

JUNEAU ALASKA-- A community group's efforts to place a life-scale bronze sculpture of a breaching humpback whale rising from an infinity pool on Juneau's waterfront were measurably advanced by the Rasmuson Foundation's Friday announcement of a \$250,000 grant towards the project.

The sculpture, which celebrates the 50th anniversary of Alaska's statehood, will rise more than 25 feet from an infinity pool located on waterfront land in Bridge Park, near the bridge to Douglas. Internationally acclaimed artist R. T. (Skip) Wallen, whose other works in Alaska include "The Windfall Fisherman" grizzly bear sculpture in Juneau, and the "Lend Lease Memorial"-- the Alaska-Siberia World War II Memorial-- in Fairbanks, was commissioned to undertake the sculpture by a citizen's group led by Kathy Kolkhorst Ruddy and the late Juneau mayor William Overstreet, who died earlier this year. Statewide Chair is Ermalee Hickel.

Wallen drew his inspiration for the whale sculpture while observing a group of feeding humpback whales off the West coast of Admiralty Island. The whales would erupt from the depths, their maws agape, their throats distended as they crushed through the herring. "In the thrill of witnessing this titanic spectacle, an idea occurred to me that this experience could be celebrated in public art, as a work that would bring pleasure and wonder to people for untold years ahead," Wallen said.

Finance Chair Laraine Derr declared, "We expect the whale to be every bit as iconic as the Space Needle is to Seattle or the Little Mermaid is to Copenhagen. We intend to match the Rasmuson Foundation's generous gift by seeking contributions from local and statewide donors

in order to achieve our goal of installing the whale during 2014.” Roughly \$500,000 remains to be raised.

The Rasmuson Foundation was created in May 1955 by Jenny Rasmuson to honor her late husband "E.A." Rasmuson. Through grantmaking and initiatives, the Foundation is a catalyst to promote a better life for all Alaskans.

For more information:

The Whale Project web site:

<http://jahc.org/sign-up-here-for-everything/contribute/humpback-whale-sculpture-project/>

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