Sculptor Chris Fennell created Canoe Wave, a wave form sculpture created by welding more than 50 canoes together. This work was created as a tribute to American explorers Lewis & Clark for the bicentennial of their expedition. The sculpture is 64 feet long and 24 feet high.

The tribute extends out into a nearby pond. Canoes have been fashioned into two waterlily-shaped fountains.

Canoe Wave Sculpture (U11A3409)
Canoe Wave was created by sculptor Chris Fennell.
Lewiston Tribune

Artist in the market for old canoes

Chris Fennell explains project he plans to build near Interstate Bridge

By Sandra L. Lee of the Tribune
Jun 9, 2010

LAPWAI - Building a wave out of canoes would be clever in Tampa, Fla., but at Lewiston, where the Snake and Clearwater rivers meet, "it all fits," artist Chris Fennell said Tuesday.

Fennell has been commissioned to build a 23-foot-tall wave on the bank of the northern pond adjacent to Interstate Bridge in Lewiston. That piece and two "lilies" that will encircle the base of the fountains in both ponds flanking the bridge will be made of discarded canoes.

He needs about 80 canoes, either aluminum or fiberglass, 60 for the wave and 10 each for the flowers. So far he has eight donated last year by Camp Wooten in Washington.

The search is on, Fennell said at a gathering at the Lapwai Nez Perce Senior Center. Truthfully, he added, he's starting to feel a little panicked as the Oct. 1 planned start of construction nears. He's paying $100 for fiberglass and $150 for aluminum, and he'll help with transportation, in return for which that old canoe will become a part of the area's history.

Fennell, 44, lives in Birmingham, Ala., and grew up near Tampa. When he learned the city of Lewiston was seeking proposals for an art piece that would be partially funded with Lewis and Clark Bicentennial money, his first thought was of the explorers paddling the rivers, he said.

With that image in mind, and his reputation of using recycled materials for pieces such as a bicycle tornado and baseball bat entry to a baseball park, he drew up his proposal and came in first out of 20 submissions.

Fennell, who began doing art work seriously 10 years ago, said his goal has always been to do things that everyone would "get," including children. Using things that people throw away makes it contemporary art.

He recalls Lewiston Parks and Recreation Director Lynn C. Moss telling him this community doesn't understand contemporary art, and asking how he would explain it. His response was that if a 5-year-old is told it's made out of canoes, he will want to see it, and that universal attraction with an element of fun is what art is all about.

It's been a struggle to be recognized, but with "green" becoming the big thing even in the art world, it's happening, he said.

In 2002, after obtaining his master of fine arts degree, he spent about three years sleeping in his pickup truck, criss-crossing the country to commissions in Wyoming, to Texas, then to Vermont, and down to Maryland, teaching and doing home construction and repairs in between.

In 2004, he gave up the side jobs to devote full time to sculpture, but those early construction skills continue to influence what he does. He's a welder and a carpenter, and builds to the power of four, he said, making sure "four drunk frat boys" can't dismantle one of his works.

His creations stand in front of museums in Davenport, Iowa, and Chattanooga, Tenn., and on the southern tip of Key West, Fla.

In the past three years, public art jobs such as this one have allowed him to do more than pay for diesel and upkeep on the truck, he said.

When he graduated, "we thought the ones who got teaching jobs were lucky. Now they look at me and say, 'you're doing it.'"

The wave or a vortex is a consistent theme. Everything he does has the feel of things moving, he said. With the canoes, "I will try to get lines of color because it makes it flow."

The Lewiston project also will have a companion piece, as yet undetermined, that will be contributed by the Nez Perce Tribe. The Nez Perce were river people before the time of horses and the intent is to explain that evolution and the historical connection, said Ann McCormack, economic development planner with the tribe.

The area around the central piece also likely will be planted with indigenous plants and shrubs recognized in the journals of the explorers.

Fennell wants his pieces to fit their environment, but he's still looking for a buyer for one he envisions: a giant tortoise whose shell segments would be made of Volkswagen Beetle tops welded together.

For now, though, he faces that Oct. 1 deadline to find 72 more canoes.
I recently had the occasion to return to my beloved Lewis-Clark Valley and would like to thank the person(s) responsible for the fantastic canoe sculptures by the bridge. Not only do they represent, to me anyway, the fabulous adventures and tenacity of the Lewis and Clark expedition, but also the proud heritage of our native nation Nez Perce community.

I would also like to thank the sculptors and donators of the other various sculptures around the valley. They truly do personify our history and heritage. It was a pleasure and a delight to show and have my grown children discover on their own, these beautiful additions to my beloved home area.

On the other hand, while visiting the Normal Hill Cemetery and paying my respects to departed loved ones, I was utterly mortified and saddened at the condition of some of the grave areas. I understand they have their own water supply, and it was the end of a time of drought and a heat wave, but there were areas no water was getting to and areas the grass was green and lush. Would it be too much to ask to have the sprinkler system repaired, if that is the problem, so our loved ones have a pleasant place to rest, and those of us who love and cherish them can be proud to come too? I believe the dried-up weedy area I'm referring to is the Knights of Pythias section. There may be more, but that's where I visited.

Darlene Shadbolt
Layton, Utah
Work resumes on fish mural
Lewiston native back in town to paint scene behind Canoe Wave

• By JENNIFER K. BAUER of the Tribune
• Apr 9, 2013

Artist Rolf Goetzinger washes off the winter dust and grime Monday on the west side of the Sonoco building as he prepares to finish his mural that will serve as the backdrop to the Canoe Wave sculpture near the Interstate Bridge in Lewiston.

Work on what will be the region's largest outdoor mural is resuming this week.

With the arrival of spring, artist Rolf Goetzinger of Sandpoint is back in Lewiston to finish his river painting that will serve as a backdrop for the Canoe Wave sculpture off the Interstate Bridge on the Lewiston Levee.

The first task will be to pressure wash the wall of the Sonoco building. After that, Goetzinger will begin to apply the cool colors of a whirlpool and water scene. The final step will be painting multi-colored fish swimming across the 27-foot-tall, 225-foot-long concrete canvas. The fish include salmon and a sturgeon.

"It's like you're looking through sparkling water, so you see the sunlight on the fish," Goetzinger said Monday after arriving at the site, which has been stenciled with an outline of the mural's elements since last fall.

Goetzinger said he brought 30 gallons of acrylic paint for the job. He will mix many of the colors himself and apply them to the wall with a 61/2-inch roller. Anything bigger than that gets too heavy to hold over time, said the artist, who has painted water towers and outdoor walls around the country.

One of his jobs this summer will be painting a giant cigar label on a water tank in Tampa, Fla.

Goetzinger is the brother of Peter Goetzinger, who painted the mural of historic downtown Lewiston at the corner of Fifth and Main streets. The brothers grew up in Lewiston.

"It's nice to be able to put something back in the town where you're from," he said.

Goetzinger used a projector last fall to make the outlines for the mural. But temperatures soon dropped, and he had to put off finishing the project until this spring.

Final work on the mural is expected to take about 14 days, but progress will depend on the weather. Goetzinger has until May 10 to complete the project, said Lewiston Parks and Recreation Director Tim Barker.

Native plants and a pedestrian path will be added to the site this summer, Barker said. Landscape architect Brian McCormack is designing the area, which will include artwork by Lapwai children etched on rock.

The west Lewiston enhancement was an Idaho Transportation Department project paid for with $500,000 in transportation department funds matched by $138,000 in Lewis-Clark Bicentennial appropriations, $55,000 in city cash and in-kind contributions from Avista Utilities and city staff.
Lewiston Tribune

Flood of work begins at 'Canoe Wave'

Native plants and background mural should be in place by late September

• By JENNIFER K. BAUER of the Tribune
• Aug 2, 2012

Work has begun on the landscaping around the canoe sculpture.

The landscape around Lewiston's "Canoe Wave" is being sculpted into place.

Pathways will soon make the public artwork more accessible for viewing, and the artist painting the mural that will become its background is scheduled to start next month.

The work marks the final stages of the west Lewiston enhancement project.

The land around the public art sculpture is being cleared and moved into two levels this week. Basalt walls are to be installed on Friday, said Lewiston Parks and Recreation Director Tim Barker.

A stairway will run down through the center of the walls and will connect to two access trails, he said. One will lead to the Interstate Bridge. The other will connect to D Street and the parking lot of the Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center at the Confluence, where the Tsceminicum sculpture is located.

After irrigation is added, the area around "Canoe Wave" will be planted with simple native shrubs in early September, Barker said.

Landscaping for "Canoe Wave" was delayed for a year while city officials worked with Watco Companies, owner of the Great Northwest Railroad line that runs beside the 23-foot-tall sculpture. The company felt the artwork was built within their right-of-way, posing a danger to workers who hang out of cars watching for obstructions, Barker said.

The company and the city reached an agreement allowing the sculpture to remain where it is. A small flashing light was posted on the sculpture to alert railway workers to its presence at night.

A mural on the industrial building behind "Canoe Wave" was also put on hold until talks with the railroad were completed.

Artist and Lewiston native Rolf Goetzinger, of Sandpoint, will paint a 27-foot-tall mural of native fish swimming in a whirlpool on the Sonoco Building. Goetzinger will start painting in late August, Barker said. The mural should be completed by mid- to late-September.

Goetzinger is the brother of Peter Goetzinger, who painted the mural of historic downtown Lewiston at the corner of Fifth and Main streets.

After the enhancement project Barker said he and his staff will turn their focus to plantings and landscaping for the First and Fifth street rebuild project downtown.

The west Lewiston enhancement was an Idaho Transportation Department project paid for with $500,000 in ITD funds matched by an $138,000 Lewis-Clark Bicentennial appropriation, $55,000 in city cash and in-kind donations from Avista utilities and city staff.
The Canoe Wave is at the west entrance to Lewiston.

An artist’s rendering that will be painted onto the building behind the canoe sculpture. The much-debated Canoe Wave will get a new backdrop in coming weeks.

A mural featuring native fish swimming around a river whirlpool will soon take shape on the west wall of the Sonoco Building at the western edge of Lewiston.

The mural and landscaping around the canoe sculpture will be the final pieces of an entryway project that has generated plenty of conversation around the Lewiston-Clarkston Valley.

"Where the whirlpool area is, that would be right behind where the canoes are," Lewiston Parks and Recreation Director Tim Barker said. "Those are just native fish swimming around."

Artist and Lewiston native Rolf Goetzinger, of Sandpoint, will paint the 27-foot-tall mural along the 255 feet of the building's western and southern sides. Goetzinger is the brother of Peter Goetzinger, who painted the recently dedicated mural of historic downtown Lewiston at the corner of Fifth and Main streets.

The 23-foot-tall Canoe Wave near the confluence of the Snake and Clearwater rivers was installed last spring. Local reception to the sculpture has been split, with some revering the 44 canoes as a discussion piece while others have dismissed the project as recycled scrap aluminum.

Barker said the mural is being designed to provide a more suitable backdrop for the canoes than the industrial western wall of the Sonoco building.

"It will be the entire west side of the building, and wrap around toward the south to make it not kind of a straight line," he said.

The sculpture, basalt columns, enhancements to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ponds along Snake River Avenue and the construction of an entrance sign were all part of a $904,000 project funded primarily with grants from the Idaho Transportation Department and Lewis-Clark Bicentennial Fund. Local tax money totaling about $55,000 went into the project, Barker said.

Additional landscaping and the mural itself will utilize the final approximately $80,000 of that funding.

The mural will become a reality once the city hears final word back from the Great Northwest Railroad in the coming weeks. Barker said railroad officials have asked the city to move the sculpture a maximum of 6 feet to the west to accommodate and not disrupt rail cars with rail workers that may travel by.

"Their right of way from center of track, they like to keep it closer to 20, 25 feet from the center of the track, and the edge of this structure is 16 feet currently," Barker said.

Barker said the city hopes to have the entire project completed by June.
Dunk the wave

I know how to make a wave with the canoes at Sonoco. Just take the whole mess and throw it in the Snake River.

I don't know where these oddball ideas come from? Wasting $1 million in grant dollars that could have provided sidewalks or trees or some normalcy to the area would have been a positive way to spend grant money.

But, no. I would hide in shame if I had concocted this wasteful and ridiculous idea. Grant writers for the city of Lewiston are like clowns in a circus, and this circus needs to stop and think before making us look like a laughingstocks over again and again.

John Barker, you just don't get it.

Margot Mackey

Lewiston
Ironic? Hardly

Marty Trillhaase's treatise on public art is rather flawed (June 19). Why is a non-ironic piece deemed a "confection" - is Dave Sears' Brackenbury Square fountain statuary a confection merely for being representational? People have their picture taken next to giant balls of string, Mr. Trillhaase. Being a curiosity is not the same as being a work of art.

Give Trillhaase credit, though, for allowing that critics of Rick Davis' "Ganesha" statue are thinking - his predecessor surely would have derided them as Philistines. Making one think, while an excuse for Trillhaase's work and letters like this one, is not a valid justification for art.

Art is most properly judged on an aesthetic, not cognitive, standard and failing to apply such a standard is Trillhaase' worst error.

Davis' "Ganesha" is ugly and what aesthetic it has comes from Star Wars' Mos Eisely cantina. It's the kitsch "Buddy Christ" of Hinduism.

By contrast, Christopher Fennell's "Canoe Wave," while odd in choice of media, is an exercise in synectics that readily connects aesthetically with the work of Hokusai and other artists.

As it turns out, "Ganesha" is for sale. Perhaps Trillhaase can convince young Master Alford to pony up $35,000 and have the thing placed so that the statue of Tommy Campbell appears to be contemplating it.

Now that would be ironic.

Thomas A. Hennigan
Lewiston

Consider the context

Location. Location. Location. Just as this is of great importance in the selling of real estate, it can make a vast difference in how the public responds to a piece of art.

In the case of "Canoe Wave," the current location only contributes to the perception that it looks like a pile of scrap metal behind the warehouse and next to railroad tracks. Couldn't a better place have been found for the sculpture, such as Kiwanis Park near the river? If it had been made more accessible to viewers on a more suitable site, they might have taken a liking to it.

At the very least, the warehouse wall should be painted a color that would enhance the sculpture. And if the loading dock doors must remain in place, they should be the same color as the wall.

Mary Liapis
Lewiston