

FORT WORTH BUSINESS PRESS

Historic Flatiron Building now features Wild Bunch public art wall sculpture

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George Cravens, board-certified neurosurgeon and owner of the historic Flatiron Building, dedicated his latest public art installation, “The Wild Bunch,” outside the building on Friday, Dec. 8.

Cravens explained that he grew up in Fort Worth listening to stories about Fort Worth and its history from his grandfathers.

“One of the things that always captured my imagination was the Butch Cassidy, Sundance Kid gang, the Wild Bunch,” Cravens said during the work’s dedication, later thanking architect Raymond O’Connor, general contractor Scott Bennett and artist Franco Alessandrini for their parts in bringing everything to fruition.

Cravens said from the time he and Alessandrini came up with the idea for the sculpture to the dedication today about 10 years passed, but now the Flatiron building is home to a 2,000-ton bronze sculpture featuring the Wild Bunch and two plaques about the gang and Hell’s Acre. The piece lights up at night, “so you can’t miss it,” Cravens said.

“Growing up here you heard stories about the different pieces of the history of Fort Worth — everything from the Wild Bunch to the sleeping panther to cattle drives and more,” Cravens said. “Over the years, you know, you’ll be someplace and see that picture [of the Wild Bunch].”

Cravens added that he wanted the sculpture to be an interactive piece of public art where people can come and go, touch it, read the plaques and help recapture the history of the area.

District 7 City Councilmember Dennis Shingleton and District 9 City Councilmember Ann Zadeh attended the piece’s dedication and presented a certificate of recognition to Cravens on behalf of Mayor Betsy Price and the city council.

“This tremendous piece of public art resolidifies and reemphasizes this cowboy and cultural city that we love,” Shingleton remarked on the sculpture.

Shingleton read aloud the statement on Cravens' certificate of recognition: "Dr. Cravens is a Fort Worth who has a passion for the preservation and celebration of Fort Worth history. After his extensive renovation of the Flat Iron building, he relocated his surgical practice ... here. Among his contributions to the Fort Worth public art scene is the Panther Fountain in the historic Hyde Park. Contributions like this strengthen our reputation as an all-American city and ensure that the city is recognized as one of the best places to live, work, grow serve and retire."

But, this piece isn't the first Cravens has worked with Alessandrini to bring to Fort Worth and it won't be his last.

"In the near future," as described by Cravens, he and Alessandrini will debut a 12-16 foot tall piece in Hyde Park that they've been working on since before Wild Bunch. Cravens says the piece will show the history of Fort Worth from the cattle drives and wagon trains to the oil derricks and ranching and more.

The building was designed by the Fort Worth firm of Sanguinet & Staats and opened in 1907. It was modeled after the Flatiron Building in New York that opened in 1902. It was designed by Daniel Burnham of Chicago in the Beaux-Arts style.