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Outdoor arts gallery a 'great destination'

Revitalization of Gaines continues with sculpture garden groundbreaking

By Julian Pecquet
DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

Are you bored with magnolias, camellias and azaleas?

Tallahassee's newest garden has some different feasts for the eyes, whether it's a giant insect, a starship-looking "Suncruiser" or a wall of iron and steel.

Business leaders, city officials and community activists broke ground Thursday for the Charles Hook Sculpture Garden at 621 Gallery. The garden, part of the revitalization efforts for the Gaines Street corridor, should feature sidewalks, lighting and landscaping by the beginning of September.

"We're almost trying to make this into an outdoor arts gallery, as opposed to just a sculpture garden," said Adam Boynton Kaye, the co-owner of the arts park.

Sculptures have been gracing the arts park since 1981, but they were placed haphazardly and no one was really looking after them, said Denise Drury, the executive director of Railroad Square's nonprofit 621 Gallery. Now the gallery is taking the lead in turning the garden, named after a longtime Florida State University professor of sculpture, into a large collection of contemporary sculpture in an illuminated garden.

Thanks to a \$35,000 grant from the taxpayer-funded Community Redevelopment Agency and \$10,000 from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the garden will be connected to Railroad Avenue through new sidewalks and will feature lighting and landscaping, courtesy of Wood + Partners Inc.

"It's going to be a great destination for the Gaines Street area," said Sine Murray, the project planner with Wood + Partners Inc.

Nine sculptures will grace the garden permanently, and the gallery is also sponsoring an annual sculpture contest — applications are available at 621gallery.org — to choose sculptures for three of the seven temporary exhibition spots. The gallery is trying to raise an extra \$80,000 for walkways within the garden and other improvements, Drury said.

Patrons who attend tonight's First Friday event at Railroad Square will already see some changes. The garden has been cleared of brush and dead limbs thanks to the Gibbs & Culpepper Tree Service, and since January FSU's Master Craftsman Studios has had 14 students in the new sculpture conservation class remove rust from the sculptures and repaint them to make them like new.

"We're sprucing (the garden) up and making it more accessible to the public," said Hailey Nicol, a senior graphic design student at FSU.

