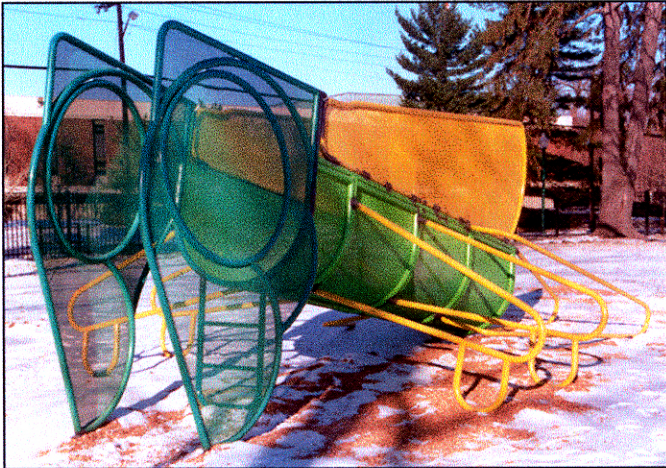


The ADVOCATE®

www.stamfordadvocate.com

THURSDAY • JANUARY • 13 • 2000



contributed photo

'The Grasshopper' designed and built by artist David Boyajian sits in the park that separated Hart Magnet and Cloonan Middle schools on Adams Street.

By Agnes Diggs
Staff Writer

They can swat it, stomp it or even spray it, but the 600 students at Hart Magnet Elementary School can't squelch the big, brightly colored bug on their playground. Nor do they want to.

"The Grasshopper," a steel sculpture designed and built by artist David Boyajian of Ridgefield, was made for children to climb, straddle and dream on. It has two hind legs, four front legs, a large, tubular caged body, a plated back section, wings and antennae that can be used as hand rails.

"It's really a novel idea," said Jeannie Kasindorf, a PTA member who worked on the project and has a second-grader, Alana, at the school. "When most schools think of art, they'll put in a mural or a sculpture that you can't touch. Art should be something they can approach freely, without being afraid to touch."

Principal Nadine Schultz said parents and officials wanted Hart's mission as a science and technology school to be reflected in the project.

"The kids are excited about it," Schultz said. "They're excited that it's so big."

The children chose the sculpture from a selection of models placed in the Stamford school's hallway, Schultz said. Of the different possibilities, the grasshopper and a dinosaur were the finalists. The grasshopper prevailed.

"It's something a little different, which is nice," Schultz said. "That's what sculpture should be about, something you can touch, not something behind a bar."

In keeping with the new artwork, which the children are calling "The Millennium Bug," the school's science teacher has planned a three-month unit for the first-grade class that will focus on the subject of insects, Schultz said.

Funds for the sculpture came from the "One Percent for Arts" fund, a city ordinance passed in 1985. The ordinance stipulates that public buildings built with city funds must set aside 1 percent of the construction money for artwork to be an integral part of the building. Artwork was defined as "including but not limited to frescoes, mosaics, sculpture and other architectural embellishment or functional

Students jump at 'Grasshopper'

Sculpture a welcome addition to Hart Magnet's playground

Brown and others involved in the project credit Boyajian's skill, diligence and concern for safety.

"David really has a lot of imagination and he was very easy to work with," Brown said. "I was initially kind of nervous about an engineer and an artist working together."

art created by a professional artist, artisan or craftsman."

A subsequent supplemental ordinance reapportioned the 1 percent for art, allocating 75 percent of the designated amount for the "historic reconstruction of the Stamford Old Town Hall," and the remaining 25 percent of the 1 percent for municipal art.

Robin Stein, bureau chief of the city's Land Use Management Department, worked with the principals and parent-teacher committees of the schools, letting them know how much money was available and ensuring that the projects followed proper procedures.

The arts program adds to the quality of life in Stamford, Stein said.

"In addition to bricks and mortar, there are other things that are equally important, such as expressing our cultural and artistic heritage," Stein said. "Art provides the added dimension that makes it desirable to walk around, drive around your city, or go to a playground and say, 'Hey, we put this here.' And it becomes part of our heritage."

Installing the 26-foot grasshopper as a play apparatus required that the city meet certain safety standards, Stein said.

The bug idea was almost killed because of liability con-

cerns, but Allen Brown, the city's safety officer, helped out on the project.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission has established guidelines for playground equipment safety. The guidelines aren't mandatory, but the city wanted to conform with them when setting its safety standard, Brown said.

"We took as much care as possible," Brown said. "It's sitting on 10 inches of engineered wood chips, so if a child falls, he won't injure himself."

Brown, who has an engineering degree, worked closely with Boyajian to make sure there were no places where a child could get caught.

Boyajian has a master's degree in fine arts from Maryland Institute College of Art, Rinehart School of Sculpture, in Baltimore. He is director of studies in the Sculpture Department of the Silvermine School of Art in New Canaan.

Boyajian's work has been exhibited nationally and internationally. Examples can be seen at Darien High School, a 9-foot by 20-foot by 6-foot stainless steel opus called "The Wave;" and in the lobby of the IMAX Theater in South Norwalk, a 2-foot by 16-foot by 6-foot piece called "Pop Art," created from steel mesh and Pepsi cans.