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## At Fairfax Library, Reading Is Truly an Art Form

By Michael Laris  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
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William Gordon has gotten good at doing creatures, the common currency of many public art projects. He and his wife, Barbara, did a donkey dressed as Uncle Sam and a "Kung Pao" panda sitting in a bowl of noodles for the District. They did eight five-foot crabs for [Baltimore](#), including two dressed in Orioles uniforms, one black, one orange.

The Springfield residents -- he's a graphic artist making his living on publications; she's a legislative analyst for a health association -- also worked up three sea gull sculptures for Ocean City, and their entry in a swine-themed project in barbecue-mad Lexington, N.C., was "Pigskin." They sculpted some stitching on the blank pig's back, applied some leathery brown stain and put white stripes around its neck and hindquarters. Someone later turned the idea into Christmas ornaments.

So it took a bit of an adjustment when the couple saw the call for entries from the Fairfax Library Foundation: Transform a big, flat book leaning against two other volumes into a compelling riff on the theme Art in the Pages, to promote reading and community.

"Most of the cities tend to do something a little more cutesy," Gordon said. But he liked the challenge.

"This was perfect, to do books for the library. It gave you just a really good surface to work on," Gordon said, and a better chance to "tell a real story about the county."

Across the county and Fairfax City, the story is unfolding in 31 vastly varied sculptures, mostly at libraries.

"Mapping the Future" shows [George Washington](#) surveying Fairfax. "All Fairfax Reads" brings in [Harry Potter](#) and Stuart Little. "Fairfax Frogs" is covered with local species, among them the northern and southern cricket frogs and the eastern spadefoot toad. "Crossroads Elephants" plays on the life of a 19-century pachyderm once owned by Hachaliah Bailey. The intersection at Route 7 and Columbia Pike was named for the Bailey family, which owned land there, although no elephant actually came.

Bobbi Longworth, executive director of the Fairfax Library Foundation, said the effort is the first public art project in Fairfax.

"It's a well-read population. It's very highly educated," Longworth said. "It's the one commonality that truly brings the entire population together: reading."

She estimated that by the end of the project, about \$50,000 will be raised from corporate sponsors, as well as from a September auction of small reproductions of the statues. The money supports foundation projects in the public libraries, including a summer reading program, homework help and literacy outreach.

The full-size statues weigh 200 pounds and are made of foam-filled polyurethane. Each one stands just under four feet tall, is nearly five feet wide and is attached with steel bolts to a 650-pound concrete base. All will probably remain in place indefinitely, Longworth said.

Aaron Eby, 18, created "Volunteers in the Library," a tribute to Bill Crockett, a retired government worker who was an artist in residence at the Kings Park Community Library in Burke before he died last year. Crockett's paintings and children's murals are hung throughout the branch. Eby's work shows Crockett pointing to one of his pieces, an image of a scribe writing in a book.

"There are really amazing artists in [Fairfax County](#), names that you probably wouldn't have heard of" without this project, Eby said. "The best thing about it is the community will be able to enjoy it. That's the joy of public art."

Kings Park branch manager Daria Parnes said Crockett has been missed.

"The volunteers -- without their help, we just couldn't provide the services we've got. Without Bill Crockett, we wouldn't have all the beautiful murals and art we have around here," Parnes said.

Gordon's sculpture plays on the Cinderella ride of the [George Mason](#) men's basketball team's trip to the Final Four. During those heady

days in 2006, students celebrated, using their namesake founding father's statue, which sits in the middle of campus.

"They would tie pom-poms around his hands. They put, like, a basketball jersey on his body, sort of decorated him up each time they won," Gordon said.

His entry, "Path to Glory," shows a festively adorned Mason with a basketball in front of a scroll of opposing teams.

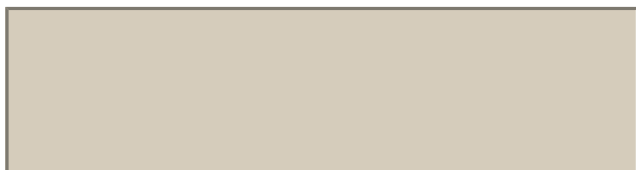
"It was probably the biggest sports story for the county ever," Gordon said. Now his sculpture has been placed on campus as well. "You feel like you're giving away your firstborn. You don't know what's going to happen to them after that."

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