

# LOCAL FRONT

SECTION AA

## RAZZLE DAZZLE ON BROADWAY

### Art, redevelopment: Perfect together

LONG BRANCH

At the corner of Broadway and Liberty, on top of the Investors Savings building, a man in a business suit is upside-down, doing a hand stand, holding on to the back of an ordinary wooden chair with his right hand, using his left for balance, as if he were riding a bucking bronco. His tie flapping in the wind, the man's face is frozen in a permanent smile as he looks longingly in the direction of the Cafe Lapa across the street.

He is able to maintain this smile not because of some desperate caffeine craving, it turns out, but because his face is a rubber mask. In fact, he is made entirely of rubber, wood and foam, held together by a concealed steel post and tethered to the rooftop by wires that are invisible from the street.



**BILL HANDLEMAN**

"Balancing Man," as he is known, is the creation of Bob Mataranglo, an adjunct professor at Brookdale Community College.

Mataranglo, who lives in Avon, is among the 23 modern sculptors chosen by the Shore Institute of the Contemporary

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Sculptures of a man, (right), tentacles (top) and flowers (above) add to the streetscape along Broadway and elsewhere in Long Branch. (STAFF PHOTOS; ADEVA STEVENS)



A mosaic bench (above) and windows painted on boarded-up storefronts (center) improve the scenery during downtown reconstruction. (STAFF PHOTOS; JEANNE CLAUDI)

Storefront murals and outdoor sculptures set the stage for Long Branch's downtown redevelopment.

## Handleman

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Arts (SICA) to have their work displayed around Long Branch for the next six months, up and down Broadway, out on Ocean Avenue, in Pier Village, along the Promenade, everywhere.

The idea for an urban sculpture park, as they call this, was originally floated a couple of years back by Doug Ferrari, the director of SICA. City officials liked the idea. Plans for the exhibition began in the fall, and by April modern sculptures started popping up all over town.

"Art is wonderful for redevelopment," says Ferrari, a former professor at Brookdale and at Ocean County College who always wanted his own place to teach sculpture. He now runs the 20,000-square-foot SICA building on Third Avenue.

Years ago, they made gallon-sized tin cans for olive oil in this building. Before that, in the early 1920s, they assembled Richelieu automobiles here. This didn't last. The Richelieu was a flash in the pan, the Edsel of its day.

Today, the 20,000 square feet in downtown Long Branch are dedicated to art in general and sculpture in particular. Currently, high school students from all over New Jersey have their work on display here.

Meanwhile, out on the street, the city is slowly getting culture.

Why Long Branch? Because there's a train station here, because there's an ocean a few blocks away and because there's redevelopment right around the corner, where the Broadway Art Center will one day revive the downtown area.

As it happens, redevelopment is also good for art. Dollars and cents: In an area targeted for an economic and social makeover, there will usually be "a little more of a lending impetus, let's say," as Ferrari puts it.

So this could be a marriage made in a 21st-century planning board meeting. Artists move in because the rent's cheap, peaceful community crops up around newcomers, as it did in Jersey City and Hoboken, and soon you have less crime and more commerce. Eventually, that is. First you have to work out the kinks.

Sometimes, this is difficult. Last month, for instance, one of the artists put her work — "Sculpture for Day Laborers" — in her designated area over by the muster zone at Liberty and Union. Soon thereafter, someone called the department of public works, and they sent a truck out to collect the rubbish.

The artist was understandably offended, as were the 120 members of SICA.

The sculpture was promptly brought back and restored to its proper place, and apologies were offered and accepted. No permanent harm, no foul.

"I think the sculptures are

neat, but they're different," explains Howard (Chubb) Woolley, the city's business administrator. "It's not your everyday normal stuff. Some of it is pretty avant-garde.

"I'm told it's supposed to challenge your reality. Working in municipal government, my reality is challenged every day."

"Some people don't know quite what to make of it, but the reaction has been mostly positive," adds Ferrari. "People are just glad to see public art."

Or "accessible art," as Bob Mataranglo calls it. "You don't need to have read Nietzsche to appreciate it."

A long block down from the upside-down businessman on the roof, past all the empty store fronts and the liquor store, past the tiny bodega and the barber shop where you can have your important documents notarized while you get a little off on the sides, another sculpture has blossomed. Across the street from the 5 Corners Laundromat, which is closed, two giant red flowers have sprouted next to a vacant lot strewn with trash.

The flowers are made of gas pumps, the hoses serving as stems. The sculpture, created by Dana Filbert, is ironically titled "Sweet Nectar".

Then, you get in the car and drive over to Pier Village, and when you arrive at the end of Garfield Avenue you are struck by a stunning blue apparition.

You can't miss it. You can't very well overlook 60 blue, 10-foot-long plastic tubes swaying in the breeze on the island in the middle of the circle.

This is "Tentacle Waving", and it is the creation of Amy Felton-Toth of Neptune, who had help from her "installation manager," Harry Hukkimen.

Felton-Toth found her materials in the electrical aisle at Lowe's, bought them for \$3 apiece, and tried her idea out on the neighbors before she submitted it to SICA. The neighbors liked it. So did the SICA judges. Now, she is prominently displayed. Not bad for a computer analyst with four kids.

"The director of the Jersey City Museum was shocked," she says. "I didn't want to tell her it was my first sculpture."

Mataranglo likes her work a lot. He says it has "an ethereal quality" to it. She calls it "a kinetic quality." Either way, it's a sight to behold, as are all the creations rising from the fertile ground of a city that has been crying out for a spiritual shot in the arm since urban decay set in decades ago.

Art is good for the spirit, you see. And you don't have to have read Nietzsche to understand this. All you have to do is look up at the man performing the precarious balancing act on top of the building and smile.

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