

Aberdeen artist victorious

Sculptor Ben Victor's work in high demand

By Russ Keen
American News Writer

Aberdeen sculptor Ben Victor continues to make his artistic mark in places far from Aberdeen.

Iowa's First Lady Christie Vilsack recently called Victor to tell him he's been selected to create a sculpture of Belle Babb Mansfield, the first woman licensed to practice law in the U.S. in 1869.

Mansfield graduated from Iowa Wesleyan College in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, and that's where Victor's statue will stand. It's a \$100,000 commission for Victor, 27, artist-in-residence at Northern State University.

In addition, he recently returned from competition in Lawrence, Kan., where he received a \$65,510 contract to create a sculpture of a firefighter for the city's new fire station.

About 80 vied for the Lawrence job. Runner-up was Jim Brothers, a Lawrence sculptor and an acquaintance of Victor. The two artists are the only two living sculptors with works in the National Statutory Hall in the U.S. Capitol.

Each state is allowed two statues in the hall. One of Nevada's is of Sarah Winnemucca, the first American Indian woman to write a book in English. Victor created the statue. Brothers' statue of Dwight Eisenhower for the state of Kansas is in the national hall.

Victor also holds the distinction of being the youngest sculptor ever to have a work in the national hall. He was 26 when his Winnemucca work was dedicated in Washington, D.C., last year.

Victor's firefighter also might appear at Aberdeen's fire station, he said. Lawrence has given him the right to create two other statues of the firefighter as long as both are placed at least 500 miles from Lawrence and 500 miles apart.



American News Photos by John Davis

'So fulfilling': Ben Victor smooths out clay on a sculpture of a firefighter he is working on in his studio at Northern State University. Victor was recently selected to create a statue of Belle Babb Mansfield, the first woman licensed to practice law in the U.S. in 1869, for Iowa Wesleyan College in Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

Victor said he never gave a thought to becoming a sculptor until he was 22 or 23 and a student at Northern State University in Aberdeen.

"But as a little boy, I drew all the time," he said.

The Bakersfield, Calif., native has lived in Aberdeen for six years. He took a sculpturing class at NSU. Sherri Treeby and Lee Leuning of Aberdeen and Pierre, respectively, and a well-known sculptor team, noticed Victor's work and encouraged him, he said.

Victor is also known for his trilogy of soldier sculptures at Aberdeen Regional Airport. And last year the city of Reno, Nev., commissioned him to renovate a street in the city's historic district for \$160,000. The project involves two sculptures, benches, bike racks and light post banners.

Victor's commissions are not the same as take-home pay because he pays for all his sculpting expenses from these monies.

The career is satisfying emotionally, he said. Starting a new piece invariably



Take notice: Samson, one of Victor's first pieces to receive attention, is a life-size statue of the biblical character.

unlocks bursts of creative energy, he said, and seeing a finished work installed is "so fulfilling."

Victor's first work to receive attention was a life-size statue of the biblical character Samson that took shape in 2002.

"Things just snowballed from then on," Victor said.



One of three: Scale model of the firefighter sculpture by Ber Victor that has been commissioned by the Lawrence, Kan. fire department.