

The ripple effects of life in art



DAVE MUNDAY

A new sculpture in Charleston gives pause for reflection on the meaning of life. It was dedicated on a Saturday two weeks ago in front of Synagogue Emanu-El Conservative Congregation in West Ashley. It's called L'Dor V'Dor in Hebrew, or "From Generation to Generation."

The bronze sculpture is about 7 feet tall. Three sets of six-pointed stars are suspended in vertically stacked diamond-shaped frames. Flowing water turns each star and then moves on to turn the next one. Then the water flows into a bed of smooth stones, enters a reservoir and is recycled back into the sculpture.

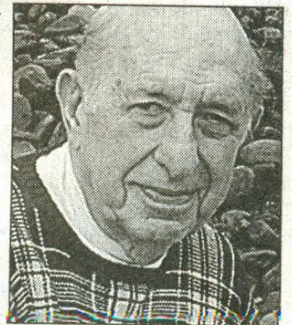
The stones are contained by a six-sided concrete barrier. A concrete bench sits in the grassy area on each side. Several trees provide shade. The whole area is in the middle of the driveway that loops in front of the synagogue, which is on Windsor Drive in Parkshore III off Sam Rittenberg Boulevard, near the bridge that leads into North Charleston over the Ashley River.

Rabbi Chezi Zionce remarked that the work is significant enough to strengthen the synagogue's claim as a tourist destination in its own right, along with the

Conservative and Reform Synagogue in peninsular Charleston.

Sy Baron, a recently retired chemical and nuclear engineer whose employers included the Medical University of South Carolina, bought and installed the piece to honor the memory of his late wife. Florence Chill Baron died of Lou Gehrig's disease six years ago. She was a math teacher and mother of two boys (a doctor and a lawyer, "every Jewish mother's dream," Baron said). He also calls her the reason for his own success.

Baron saw the sculpture four years ago at the Shidoni gallery near Santa Fe, N.M.



Sy Baron



"It hit me right in the heart, saying this is what she was all about," he said.

The artist is Barton Rubenstein, whose studio is in Chevy Chase, Md. He often combines metal and water in large works for public spaces.

Rubenstein was trained in physics and mechanical engineering. Then he studied the brain and visual science, fascinated by how we perceive the world. Once he started giving his own visions material substance, he decided to "indefinitely postpone" his science career.

He's been a full-time sculptor for about 10 years.

The vision for this piece came to him after he visited Israel several years ago. Seeing the ancient sites deeply moved him.

"Each generation has its own life source, and that life source passes on to the next generation," he said in a telephone interview.

That's the message Baron's son, Dr. Paul Baron, sees in the sculpture.

"It's one generation passing on to the next one and to the next one," he said.

Baron, his father, has spent a lot of time at the memorial. As an engineer, he's impressed by the repetition of the No. 18, which denotes life in Hebrew numerology.

The concrete wall is 18 feet in diameter. The three stars have 18 points. Each bench is 4½ feet long, 18 feet of benches when the four are added together. His wife's name on the plaque has 18 letters. Her memorial has 18 words.

"I started out wanting something that would memorialize her life, and life is what I got," Baron said.

Rubenstein is fascinated by the ripple effects of art itself.

"As an artist, I am moved by the possibility of making someone else's life more meaningful, less stressful, or simply bringing out a smile," he says in his Web site. "I imagine each of these positive changes beginning a chain reaction of other positive human interactions. ... When I create art, I imagine it as a small, delicate and seemingly insignificant drop of water landing on the surface of a pond. Immediately, a ring of ripples are formed around it and slowly, and almost imperceptibly they move outwards, reaching out and touching even the most remote edges of the pond."

Dave Munday covers religion and can be reached at 937-5720 or dmunday@postand-courier.com.

Water rotates a six-pointed star before moving on to the next one, a symbol of life passing on to each new generation.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRAD NETTLES/STAFF



Barton Rubenstein

