

New 'Handshake' sculpture unveiled

Mayor McKinley Price says public art is an important feature for Newport News



JOE FUDGE/DAILY PRESS

Justin Long adjusts one of the hands of the new "Handshake" sculpture during its installation last month. The work is located at the City Center roundabout.

BY JOE LAWLOR

jlawlor@dailypress.com | 757-247-7874

NEWPORT NEWS — On a chilly and windy afternoon, workers removed an orange and white parachute to unveil the "Handshake" sculpture at the City Center roundabout.

"Handshake" by German artist Gunther Stilling — two giant industrial-looking hands emerging from the roundabout — is the latest public art in Newport News through the Newport News Public Art Foundation.

The privately funded sculpture made from cast aluminum with an interior stainless steel frame, cost \$156,000 and took years from concep-

tion to installation.

Stilling, during the unveiling ceremony on March 28, said that the artwork is meant to be ambiguous and inspire conversation, like people have been discussing Leonardo Da Vinci's mysterious "Mona Lisa" for centuries.

"I hope many people drive by it and say, 'What does that mean?' " Stilling said. "Art is not necessary, but it helps give us an identity."

Bobby Freeman, the founder of the public art foundation, said he's excited that an artist of Stilling's stature is being displayed in Newport News. Stilling's work appears all over Europe.

"What's really special about public art is that it's art for everyone. You don't

have to pay to go into a building to see it," Freeman said.

Mayor McKinley Price said public art "plays a vital role" in a community. "Handshake" is the 15th public art sculpture commissioned by the foundation, and several more are in the works.

The sculpture weighs more than 1,200 pounds, or about 600 pounds per hand. It's set into a concrete base and is one of the first things that people see upon entering City Center.

Many private donors contributed to the foundation to raise money for the "Handshake," including Newport News Town Center, Northwestern Mutual and Riverside Health System.