



Mark Hanford

Becket, MA

Mark Hanford is an engineer, a sculptor, a volunteer firefighter and fire chief for the town of Becket. Last year he made the papers when he refused to stop providing volunteer firefighting assistance to the town of Washington, next door to Becket, when they were not able to pay a steep increase in fees. The townspeople rallied behind him, and Becket continued to care for its neighbor.

Artwork, especially sculpture, is an activity he has enjoyed since his youth in Pittsfield at St. Joseph High School, and later through courses at Berkshire Community College. Work and family kept him way too busy to make art for many years, until he and a group of friends and relatives began meeting weekly at East Coast Refinishing to create art together. They call themselves “Group W” (for welding on Wednesdays) and specialize in “industrial strength art.” Welding was a skill he learned at work and in the Navy, and his Group W friends refer to Mark as the “resident wizard of molten metal.”

Group W held spectacular annual shows in the cavernous 28,000 square foot space (with ceilings as high as 300 feet), attracting a thousand or more friends and arts aficionados over a single weekend. They also held several group shows of their work at the Lichtenstein Center for the Arts in Pittsfield, and Group W members, including Hanford, have been juried into Pittsfield’s annual public art show downtown. Mark has also taught welding, through IS183 Art School, for artists interested in sculpture.

When asked his advice for aspiring sculptors, he replied, “Whether you’re 18 or 80, my advice is to jump in and do as much as you can as quickly as you can. If you have an idea, build it. It’s not going to get built if you don’t just jump in.”

Mark Hanford upturns common stereotypes about artists, firefighters, and engineers with a smile that welcomes all comers.

Photography: Peter Levine

Words: Joanna Fribush and Megan Whilden