

RETURN OF THE MULE:

Lisa Oertle and her son Marcus, 7, pose with River Mule outside Hudson United Bank in Frenchtown. The Oertles, who are from Kingwood, donated the fiberglass mule to the borough after winning it on auction with a little help from the Frenchtown Business and Professional Association.

Delaware
Valley News
July 1st 2004



River mule returns to Frenchtown

By John Monteith

River Mule," one of two decorated, life-sized fiberglass mules to grace Frenchtown's Bridge Street last summer as part of the "Miles of Mules" public arts project, has been donated to the borough by a Kingwood Township couple and the Frenchtown Business and Professional Association. The piece was temporarily reinstalled at a corner of the Hudson United Bank at Harrison and Bridge Streets.

Lisa Oertle, originally from Australia, has lived in Kingwood with her husband David and son Marcus, 7, for four years. John Hindman of Thistle, president of the FBPA, which raised \$1,500 to bring the unpainted prototype to Frenchtown, bid for River Mule on behalf of the Oertles in a charity auction of about 60 Miles of Mules pieces last November, after River Mule was removed from the HUB site.

In spirited bidding the piece went

for \$5,000, the fourth highest total in the sale. The Oertles had set a bidding limit of \$4,300. The balance was provided by the FBPA. Part of the proceeds benefited the recently formed River Union Stage, a non-profit local theater company currently seeking an underwriter for its first planned dramatic production.

Both River Mule and "Kip's Mule," which had stood at the entrance to the D&R Canal State Park hiking path, were painted by Barry Sharplin, an artist from New Zealand who is co-owner, with his wife Cleo, of Alchemy Creative Clothing on Bridge Street.

Lisa Oertle said that she is a regular shopper at Alchemy, considers Sharplin a "sensational" artist, recognized the labor and creativity that had gone into River Mule, and thought that the piece should be brought back to Bridge Street to permanently reside "somewhere in the main part of Frenchtown."

Mayor Ron Sworen said that River Mule may one day be moved from the bank to a location along the Delaware River as part of a riverfront beautification program now being developed. The site would permit the work to be "visible, safe and prominent," he said.

Kipp's Mule was named after Kipp Sujet of Jutland, who died of leukemia at the age of 18. The auctioned work was won by Drew Sujet, Kipp's father, who donated it to the school Kipp attended, the Morristown-Beard School. The proceeds of the sale were also donated to the school.

"It's a wonderful feeling," commented Sharplin about seeing River Mule back in town. "People keep coming down to the store to tell me kids are climbing on it. I don't mind."

River Mule spent last winter in the Oertle's barn, he said, and "we're debating whether to take it away for the winter."

Artist offers classes to the young and old on Fridays, Saturdays

Frenchtown artist Barry Sharplin teaches art classes to children on Saturday mornings and to adults on Friday.

"It draws on their natural ability. In different mediums they explore their own directions, express their own intuitions," Sharplin said. For information about the classes, call 996-9000.

Sharplin is from New Zealand. He and his wife Cleo, own Alchemy Creative Clothing on Bridge Street.