

Legacy of Douglass: 200 Years and Counting

In 1879, Frederick Douglass wrote, “My attachment to Rochester, my home for more than a quarter century, will endure with my life.”

Our community’s attachment to Douglass also will endure.

Rochester Area Community Foundation provided a \$32,500 grant to create and place life-size statues of Douglass at historically significant locations around Monroe County to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Douglass’ birth in 1818. This grant helped to leverage \$75,000 from New York State.



“It’s almost overwhelming to keep up with everything that’s been going on,” said professor and filmmaker Carvin Eison, who is project manager of 2018’s “Re-Energizing the Legacy of Frederick Douglass.”

More than 100 nonprofit organizations, businesses, and individuals have joined the grassroots collaboration with Eison and his project co-manager, Bleu Cease, executive director of Rochester Contemporary Art Center (RoCo).

The 13 fiberglass monuments were molded by sculptor Olivia Kim, a Rochester School of the Arts graduate who majored in ceramics at Alfred University and studied in Italy before

moving back home.

Chiefly influenced by the monument in Highland Park created by Stanley W. Edwards, each of Kim's works has a slightly different patina. She also included a nod to the present by casting the hands of Douglass' great-great-great grandson Kenneth B. Morris, Jr. to use as Douglass' hands.

In addition to the statues, this year-long celebration and tribute has also included:

- Douglass exhibits at RoCo, the Rochester Public Library, the University of Rochester campus, and elsewhere;
- Talks by Morris, who is co-founder and president of the Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives;
- Inviting Rochester Institute of Technology's "Big Shot" photographers and community members to light and shoot the Highland Park monument at night prior to its relocation to a more prominent site;
- A four-day, mini-marathon reading of Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave; and
- Creation of a new website, Douglasstour.com, which includes a self-guided tour of the statue locations and more.

Eison said he is amazed that the newspaper publisher and abolitionist has had "such an impact that resonates so completely with people today from different strata, races, socioeconomic, and education levels."

Photo above: Carvin Eison helps unveil the first three statues by sculptor Olivia Kim (photo by Caleb Parker).