



## HOLDREGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOUNDATION

### *Giving Back to Education*

### ***HHS Alumni Recognition Feature!***

*Dear HHS Alumni and HPS Foundation Supporters,*

Holdrege High School is fortunate to have many very successful graduates. We are excited to continue sharing the stories of some of those HHS Alums thanks to the journalistic talents of Kristine (Long) Jacobson, Class of 1990.

We also welcome your suggestions and comments.

Sincerely,

*Teresa Kroll, Chairman  
HPS Foundation Committee*

### **George Lundeen - Class of 1966**

#### **HHS grad tells story with his hands.**

By Kristine Jacobson

Bronze sculptures crafted by Holdrege native George Lundeen grace the entrances, lobbies, and hallways of places such as the University of Nebraska, the Denver International Airport, Coors Field, Scheel's sporting goods stores, the Nebraska State Capitol, and even the Capitol Building in Washington, DC.

The 1966 Holdrege High School graduate has garnered dozens of major art awards for his work and was even proclaimed a Distinguished Nebraskan by the governor in 1995.

But, his greatest honor is seeing people enjoy his art. "Just people who walk up to your work and enjoy it - they spend that extra moment looking at it. That's the best award you can get," George said.

And, it's even better when those people enjoy his art in his hometown, where five of his sculptures are displayed, including his first 10-foot bronze sculpture, "Promise of the Prairie," in the North Park and his latest addition, "Hometown," in the lobby of the First State Bank. The other three are "Field of Blue" in front of the Phelps County Courthouse, "Joy of



Music" at the Tassel and "Tender Touch" at the Phelps Memorial Health Center.

Funds are currently being raised for a sixth piece, "Harvest Dreams," to be placed at the Nebraska Prairie Museum.

George was born at the Brewster Hospital in Holdrege, attended Franklin and Lincoln schools as a child, and enjoyed growing up in a town surrounded by his family (parents Warner and Marguerite Lundeen, brothers Swan, Mark, Nelse, Joe, and sister, Carol) and many cousins, aunts, and uncles.

He remembers some difficulty communicating as a young child. "As a kid, I stuttered and didn't talk for a long time," he said "It took me a long time to learn how to read. Maybe that's why I started drawing."

He remembers drawing horses in kindergarten, fueled by a teacher's praise of another child's horse sketches. "From the very start, I considered myself an artist of one kind or another," George said. "I always loved to draw pictures, and I always got in trouble for doodling."

In high school, he recalls Principal Jim Speece reprimanding him for doodling during class. Years later, George said Mr. Speece apologized for nearly spoiling his art career.

*The new "Hometown" bronze sculpture in the First State Bank Lobby in Holdrege.*



*This is the seven foot tall clay model for the Amelia Earhart that George and his brother, Mark, are making for "Statuary Hall" in the Capital Building in Washington.*

One former teacher, Mr. Jim Van Marter, even likes to claim he indirectly spurred George's career by kicking him out of typing class. Instead of typing, George was forced to enroll in art class during his junior year. "To this day, he takes credit for my whole art career," George said of Mr. Van Marter.

Instead of typing, George learned about art from Mrs. Louise Mulliner, who he described as a "terrific art teacher" who prepared him well for his future art studies. "I was really lucky to go to school in Holdrege," George said. "It's always had such a great educational system."

In addition to his teachers, George was supported by his parents and loved to tinker in his dad's garage. "My father was a terrific inventor," George said. "It was easy for us to go out into that garage and with all his tools, we could invent about anything."

And when George decided to study art at Hasting College after graduation, there were no questions. "I was an art major," he said. "I can't imagine what my father thought when he saw those bills coming in. But, my parents never questioned it and never had a negative word to say about it. They were always very supportive."

At Hastings College, George continued learning from many talented professors, who taught him sculpting, ceramics, and pottery. He graduated from Hastings College in 1971 with a bachelor of arts degree and then started an assistantship program at the University of Illinois. While there, he studied and taught classes and earned his master of fine arts degree and a Fulbright-Hayes Scholarship to continue his art studies in Florence, Italy, for a year. "I met a lot of great artists," George said of his time in Italy. He spent the year immersing himself in the culture, studying, attending classes, and building relationships with painters, sculptors, and other artists he still connects with today.

In addition to his talent and skill in art, his people skills, and ability to network are just as important to his successful creative career. And, he said growing up in Holdrege nurtured that skill in him as well. "If you grow up in little old Holdrege, you have to talk to everybody," he said. It was a skill he said he learned from his dad, who also always enjoyed visiting with people.

After studying in Italy, George returned to the United States in search of a job teaching art at a college. When no job offers came, he started bartending in Hastings and continued to sculpt in his spare time. Soon, his work won first place at an art show in Grand Island, and he was offered a one-year teaching job at Kearney State College as a result.

During that time, he toured an art foundry where bronze sculptures are cast, while visiting friends in Loveland, Colorado. He knew that would be his next move. So, in 1976, he began a job sweeping floors and welding at Art Castings of Colorado and continued to sculpt and network with artists and art dealers who visited there. "I was fortunate again because some of the greatest sculptors today started out there," George said. "It was a very modern art foundry. I was lucky enough to go to work for the guys there."

After a year and a half at Art Castings, his work started selling at art galleries and art shows, and he quit working for Art Castings and began Lundeen Studios in Loveland and has been sculpting and selling art ever since. "I've been very fortunate," George said of his art career. "It's very difficult because you have to have so many people along with you to push you. You have to have art dealers and you have to be lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time."

The other sculptors who work along with him are his wife, Cammie; his brother, Mark; his sister-in-law, Bets; and his sons, Eric and Warner. His daughter, Annalise, works in Denver at a floral shop and is also an artist.



*George and his daughter, Annalise, with the Jack Swigert statue in the Wings over the Rockies Air Museum in Denver.*

George said he gravitates toward the bronze sculptures because of the realism. He likes people, and he notices details in the human face and hands and said the sculptures tell their own story. "The main thing about this is you have to tell a story," he said of his art. "That's what communication is. You can tell a story with your hands. You can tell a story with your expression. You don't always have to have a language. I never was very good at abstract expressionism because it always seemed like you had to explain to someone what it was you were trying to tell."

In 1982, George was asked by the Phelps County Community Foundation to create

an over life-size bronze for the Centennial Celebration in Holdrege the following year. He created the "Promise of the Prairie" model featuring a mother and father pioneer and their young son. George said to raise funds for the sculpture, he created small models of the sculpture to sell.

"By the time we got out of the first meeting, I think they had sold a dozen of those pieces," he said. "There was a great deal of support. The people of Holdrege just came out of the woodwork." He said that sculpture was a "wonderful opportunity" for him, and he is grateful for his hometown support.

His studio is now bustling with many sculpture projects at the same time. Recently, they have been asked to create sculptures for Steve Scheel, the CEO of Scheel's sporting goods. Steve asked Lundeen Studios to create eight life-size sculptures, including a snowboarder, a hunter, a fisherman, a mountain biker and some sporting figures, for a store near Reno, Nevada, in 2008. He then asked the Lundeens to sculpt presidents Lincoln, Jefferson, Washington, and Reagan for his office in Fargo, ND. After that, Mr. Scheel enjoyed the

reactions of visitors so much that he now orders Lundeen bronze sculptures for nearly every new store he opens.

George and his team are also working on a sculpture of Amelia Earhart for the Capitol Building in Washington, DC, and on sculptures for a new Catholic retreat center in Omaha for the Ricketts family.

When he's not sculpting or working on his business, George enjoys golf, a pastime he learned to enjoy in Holdrege, where he played on the HHS golf team. He is looking forward to his 50th high school reunion in Holdrege in June and has no plans of slowing down on his art career.

"You know I just have too much fun," George said.



*George with a clay model for a sculpture he is working on for the University of Illinois.*

## About Us

*The mission of the HPS Foundation is to support and enhance the educational efforts of students and teachers of Holdrege Public Schools by providing funding for innovative and challenging programs, learning experiences, and activities.*

### **Holdrege Public Schools Foundation**

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