

Art-Speak

CITY OF PORTSMOUTH | CULTURAL COMMISSION



PORTSMOUTH FIRE DEPARTMENT

***Fired Up!*: A Symposium on Portsmouth's Newest Public Art Sculpture**

**For Immediate Release
April 29, 2009**

**Contact: Sue Cobler, Art-Speak
Coordinator, 603-610-7222**

PORTSMOUTH – Art-Speak, the City of Portsmouth's Cultural Commission, and the Portsmouth Fire Department, are inviting the public to a symposium on the process and progress of the city's newest piece of public art, "Vigilance," being installed this summer at the Central Fire Station. The "Fired Up: Celebrating Portsmouth's Newest Public Art Sculpture" symposium will be Monday, June 23, from 5:30 to 7 p.m. at the Central Fire Station at 170 Court Street.

Renowned New Hampshire sculptor Emile Birch is in the final stages of completing the 13-foot-tall bronze and brick sculpture and fountain commemorating the City's firefighting history. Birch's design was selected in 2007 following a highly competitive process. When "Vigilance" is completed in late summer or early fall, it will be Portsmouth's first piece of municipal outdoor art installed in many years. The sculpture is being financed by a combination of private donations, including a \$35,000 grant from the charitable arm of Unital's parent company, and public matching funds. Thousands of dollars worth of in-kind services also are being provided.

"This project is a model of community vision and cooperation in tribute to the commitment and sacrifice exemplified by firefighters through the centuries," says Fire Chief Christopher LeClaire.

Symposium activities will include:

- Discussion by Chief LeClaire and Assistant Fire Chief Steve Achilles on the origin of the concept and the collaboration process used to develop "Vigilance"
- An interactive presentation on the monument's process and creation by the sculptor
- A discussion of the future for public art in Portsmouth

Following the symposium, a related exhibit of Portsmouth firefighter memorabilia and the sculpture's development will be shown at the Discover Portsmouth Center through the summer.

Birch is known for his large sculptures in communities and corporations throughout the state, including the "New Hampshire Law Enforcement Officers' Memorial" on the Statehouse grounds in Concord, "The Founders Gate" in Exeter, Littleton's beloved "Pollyanna" sculpture and a wooden mosaic designed for Dover's McConnell Community Center. He also is a teaching artist who has completed residencies in colleges, schools, and communities throughout New England.

Symposium space is limited and the public is asked to RSVP by **June 18** to 603-610-7222 or scobler@cityofportsmouth.com.

The Portsmouth Fire Department serves the City's residents and visitors, business owners, and visiting ocean vessels, and also responds to calls for mutual aid from 50 area communities. Art-Speak is a non-profit organization formed to implement the City of Portsmouth's Cultural Plan. Its mission is to promote appreciation, awareness, participation, and dialogue in support of arts and culture on behalf of the City Council and local artists and art/cultural-related organizations.

