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## **SAMA-LIGONIER VALLEY COMMISSIONS SCULPTURAL WORK FOR MUSEUM LAWN**

Ligonier – Visitors to the Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art at Ligonier Valley will notice a new sculptural work on the Museum lawn. In late November, artist John Mayer installed three cattails that stand fifteen feet high. The sculptures are a result of a pair of donations the Museum received from Ligonier Valley Middle School. The school made the donations – sent in 2011 and 2013 and totaling \$1,000 – in memory of one of the school’s students who died in a tragic accident.

Christopher Harr was a 6<sup>th</sup> grade student at Ligonier Valley Middle School who died in September 2010 of a gunshot wound while visiting a friend’s house in Ligonier Township. Harr’s classmates wanted to do something to honor their late friend, so the school hosted its annual “Hoops for Hope” fundraiser, a basketball game between students and faculty. The proceeds of that game were then donated to SAMA.

“We host a fundraiser every year called ‘Hoops for Hope,’ and we donate the proceeds to different organizations,” said David Steimer, Principal of Ligonier Valley Middle School. “Chris was a good artist and loved art. I actually still have something he created hanging on my wall. Because of his interest in the arts, we felt SAMA was a good local organization for us to honor his memory.”

When SAMA-Ligonier Valley Coordinator Sommer Toffle learned of the donation, she immediately decided it needed to be put to use in a way that would create a permanent testament to Harr’s memory.

“I wanted the money to be spent in a significant and lasting way,” she said. “I originally thought of a scholarship for our art camp or a Children’s Choice Award for one of our exhibitions, but I was concerned neither of those would stand the test of time. That was when I began thinking of commissioning a sculpture.”

Toffle began looking into local artists who could create a meaningful outdoor sculpture. “I wanted it to be something interactive and fun,” she said. “I wanted it to honor Chris’s memory, but to do so in a way that would not be sullen or add to his family’s and friends’ grief. I felt we needed something whimsical and fun, something

that I hope Chris would have enjoyed. I wanted a sculpture that would be a celebration of life.”

Eventually, Toffle enlisted John Mayer for the project. A well-known artist from New Alexandria, Mayer is proficient in a variety of media, including woodworking, painting, photography, and jewelry-making, but in recent years has focused on sculpture. His work has been featured in numerous regional exhibitions, including SAMA-Loretto’s Biennial and the annual Southwestern Pennsylvania Council for the Arts exhibitions at SAMA-Ligonier Valley.

Mayer created three cattails that stand 15-feet high for placement on the Museum lawn. Each cattail is constructed around 1.5-inch galvanized rigid conduit and metal lath. The sculptures reach 3-feet into the ground and are set in 4-inch PVC pipe.

“This is a very exciting permanent piece of artwork for everyone in the community to enjoy,” said Toffle. “John Mayer was one of the first sculptors to come to mind to bring the project to fruition due to the playful and whimsical nature of his work. We are hoping to expand the sculpture garden over time as finances permit.”

The Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art at Ligonier Valley is located at One Boucher Lane and Route 711 South in Ligonier. Hours of operation are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and 1 to 5 p.m. weekends. The Museum is a handicapped-accessible facility and is open to the public free of charge. For additional information, please call the Museum at (724) 238-6015 or visit [www.sama-art.org](http://www.sama-art.org).