

Footballs to kick off art project

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Think the **football** craziness in Ann Arbor is over for a while?

Think again.

When the Super Bowl comes to Detroit in February, we'll undoubtedly feel the impact in a number of ways. But the highest profile may be, of all things, a public-**art** project.

We've reported on this before, but it's worth bringing up again. Called "Pigskins on Parade," the project will bring a series of 5-foot-high **football** -shaped sculptures to the streets of **downtown** Ann Arbor. They'll be in a standard shape, but visual artists - amateur or professional - have been invited to submit design proposals to decorate the "footballs" in unique ways.

There are some tangible benefits to the project. The idea is that companies will sponsor individual footballs, and for their money (\$3,000) they can select the design. (And for \$5,000 they can keep the **football** after it's all over.) The chosen artist gets a \$750 stipend. After the display is over, any footballs not promised to sponsors will be auctioned off. And all the proceeds from the project will benefit the **arts** endowment of the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation.

Designs and sponsorships are still being accepted, though time is short. Announcement of selected designs is expected soon, with work to begin shortly thereafter. Those who are chosen can work in their own studios, or they can use space at an Airport Plaza warehouse donated by Jake Haas.

The Ann Arbor Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, which is organizing the project, expects the footballs to be on display from mid-January into July (removed just before the Ann Arbor **Art** Fairs).

Obviously, the idea isn't totally original. It has its roots in similar efforts across the country - cows in Chicago, if memory serves, and didn't I see fish in New Orleans? But

this seems to be the first time anyone has done footballs. And in the home of the Big House, why not?

If there's decent participation, and if everyone takes it in the right spirit, this could be a fun project. Obviously, no one is going to pour their heart and soul into one of these faux pigskin canvases - at least I don't think they are - but it's still a fine chance to showcase visual creativity and brighten up gray winter streets.

As Tamara Real of the Chamber of Commerce's **Arts Alliance**, one of the project organizers, put it: "Artists are going to get work out of the Super Bowl. Who'd'a' thunk it?"

Space is available - really

Speaking of the **Arts Alliance**, earlier this year, I spent some time in this space detailing a first-of-its-kind survey of space needs that the group conducted. Finding workable, affordable room to do their thing has long been a concern of creative types in town, and the concern only rose when the old Technology Center building on West Washington Street was torn down.

The survey detailed the substantial needs faced by individuals and groups, and it led to the alliance announcing that it would start serving as a clearinghouse both for people needing space and those with space to rent.

Funny thing: The alliance has been hearing about some potential spaces, but the artists needing them seem to have vanished.

Real welcomes contact from anyone needing creative space. She can be reached at artsalliance@annarborchamber.org.

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