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Fannie Mae Duncan statue to show a Springs legend’s welcoming attitude

By Griffin Swartzell @GFeatherQuill



Lori Kiplinger Pandey, a Fort Collins-based artist, didn't know anything about Springs icon and Colorado Women's Hall of Fame inductee Fannie Mae Duncan until 2017. Pandey was showing at the 2017 Sculpture in the Park exhibition in Loveland when four members of the Fannie Mae Duncan statue steering committee approached her to make a life-size bronze statue of Ms. Duncan, to be erected outside of the Pikes Peak Center. They also sent her a copy of *Everybody Welcome: A Memoir of Fannie Mae Duncan and the Cotton Club*, written by committee chair Kathleen Esmiol.

The book documents Duncan's journey from Oklahoma — her parents were tenant farmers and her grandparents slaves — to forging the historic Cotton Club, which opened in the 1950s. The racially integrated jazz club stood out as a bastion of equality in pre-Civil Rights Colorado. Pandey, hooked by Esmiol's work, took the sign Duncan displayed in the

window as the name for her statue: "Everybody Welcome."

"She wanted everyone to have a good time and to feel special and taken care of and to have pride," says Pandy. She's been researching Duncan tirelessly to do her statue justice, collaborating with both Esmiol, who was a friend of Duncan's before her passing in 2005, and Claudine Brooks Bragg, Duncan's niece. They worked hard to portray her properly, picking out practical period clothing for a woman of business while honoring Duncan's well-known love of extravagant hats. Pandy wanted most of all to capture Duncan's welcoming personality, giving her a posture and expression that reflect her "everybody's welcome" attitude.

Pandy has blogged each step in the design and creation process, partially in the hopes that seeing all the work that goes into a statue will reduce future vandalism. The steering committee plans to unveil maquettes of the finalized statue design at a fundraising event and exhibition of Pandy's art at the Pikes Peak Center — the committee needs to raise a further \$30,000 to meet their \$100,000 budget for the statue itself, a figure that does not include shipping and other expenses. **Rocky Mountain PBS** recently released an hour-long documentary celebrating Duncan's life, now viewable on their website.

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