Anniversary gateway nears completion

Sculpture and landscape refresh mark Woodlands history



Photos courtesy of Michael McCurdy

The Woodlands' "First Fifty" sculpture rises above a key intersection, as seen during Ironman Texas in April.

By Sondra Hernandez
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A new sculpture and landscape project marking the 50th anniversary of The Woodlands is nearing completion.

The artwork, titled "First Fifty," is a 50-foot-diameter steel sculpture visible above and below the intersection of The Woodlands Parkway and Grogan's Mill Road.

The update also includes an 8-acre landscape refresh with several hundred new trees.

The intersection holds special significance because it marks the site of the first concrete pour for The Woodlands in the early 1970s. Together, the sculpture and landscape improvements are intended to celebrate the township's first 50 years while creating a new gateway that reflects its history and identity. Both projects were designed by The Woodlands-based company Landology.

Here is what to know about the new sculpture and intersection improvements:



The sculpture recognizes the community's 50-plus years and is at the site of the first concrete pour for The Woodlands.

History of The Woodlands

The Woodlands opened on Oct. 19, 1974. Developer George Mitchell founded the community with an idea to "build a town in the forest," his son Grant Mitchell said at a launch event for the 50th anniversary year in 2024.

Since its founding, the 28,500-acre, 44.5-square-mile township has grown into one of the largest master-planned communities in the country with more than 120,000 residents.

The Woodlands is made up of eight residential villages and the Town Center commercial district, including The Woodlands Mall, Market Street and the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion.

The Woodlands marked its 50th anniversary with a year of celebrations in 2024.

Landscape beautification

Longtime Woodlands resident Nelda Luce Blair is the chair of Woodlands Road Utility District No. 1 and said it had been some time since the agency sponsored a road project

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and the beautification of intersections falls into the RUD's jurisdiction.

"I was appalled at the things that I don't notice and I drive by there everyday, (regarding) the erosion, lack of planting and fading infrastructure," she said after RUD members studied the intersection before the project.

The RUD funded the landscape work on the 8 acres. The update includes more than 400 new trees, new plants and shrubs, planters, stone work and the preservation of existing trees, including three planted by Mitchell.

Blair said she can't drive through the area enough.

"I love to look at it," she said of the update. "I didn't realize how much it had faded and deteriorated. It is the first thing a lot of people see and it needs to be as beautiful as the rest of The Woodlands and we think that it will be now."

'First Fifty' sculpture

Jonathan McMillian, president and founder of Landology, said when the landscape project started it was about functionality and repair but as the design developed the historic aspect and celebrating 50 years came into play.

Landology Assistant Project Manager Patricia Uribe said the historical significance triggered the idea for a sculpture.

The sculpture was funded by The Woodlands Township, Howard Hughes and the Town Center Owners Association.

The 25-ton sculpture is visible from above and below The Woodlands Parkway in the median between the eastbound and westbound lanes. The circular nature also represents a clock face and the passage of time. The eight metallic trees are a nod to the township's eight residential villages, with branches showcasing the forested nature of The Woodlands.



Courtesy of Patricia Uribe/Landology

The Woodlands marked its 50th anniversary with a year of celebrations in 2024.

"There were four primary ideas that influenced that design. They were people, belonging, time and the native forest," McMillian said.

Uribe said the project will be complete within the next month or so. The refresh also includes lighting under The Woodlands Parkway overpass and a revamp of a plaque honoring Plato Pappas, the first civil engineer hired to construct The Woodlands.

"The site allows for a different perception in each direction," Uribe said. She said the sculpture also has different visual aspects depending on the speed and angle from which drivers approach it.

McMillian said he hopes people drive by, feel a connection to the sculpture and see themselves reflected in it.

"It is the collection of all of us together that make this community," he said.