

RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE

Capturing the Spirit of Wichita: The Wind Spirit Gateway Sculpture

Engineer:	Ed Austin, ASP Enterprises
Installation:	Utility Contractors
Artist:	Robert Roesch
City of Arts	
Coordinator:	Robert D'Angelo
Distributor:	Kansas Building Products
Manufacturer:	Pavestone
Product:	Anchor Diamond® retaining wall block

The challenge:

Create an engaging work of art to enhance the main entrance to the city of Wichita, Kansas.

The solution:

Combine metal and block for a sculpture that visually represents the essence of the city.

The full story:

Wichita, Kansas, home to more than half a million people, is located in the heart of the Midwest. The thriving city hosts The Boeing Company and several other large aircraft suppliers along with major employers in the health care field. In an effort to generate a more sophisticated image for the town, the



Against a blue sky, a tiered wall rises at angles that vary from 4 to 12 degrees to outline the hull of a boat, topped by a billowing steel sail.

Wichita city council commissioned a larger-than-life artwork to serve as a "gateway" to the city along the main street entrance to Wichita.

Robert Roesch, a sculptor and artist with experience in large installations, was selected from among the 39 artists who responded to the nationwide request for proposals. Roesch's presentation included a scaled model of fanned and pyramid elements that tie together to create the outline

of a ship. Says D'Angelo, "Roesch's idea captured our imaginations. In a very subtle way, the sculpture reflects the fluid nature of Wichita and its environment, and that appealed to the council." He adds, "The elements he proposed frame the city skyline and work nicely as an entrance to the city."

Roesch moved to Wichita for a year to experience the city and oversee the project. The first challenge he encountered was deciding what materials to use for the walls of the sculpture. Carl Savatti of Mid-Kansas Engineers walked Roesch through the various possibilities. Limestone — a resource native to the area — was ruled out because of cost. Roesch quickly determined that Anchor Diamond® retaining wall blocks were an excellent option. Says the artist, "The blocks appealed to me because they're not only natural looking, they're also easy on the environment. They allow nature to prevail." Roesch enlisted the help of a stone carver to help achieve the desired finished look.


Before construction began, ASP Enterprises modified the design to ensure structural integrity of this unusual application. As a result, the engineering group specified supporting layers of Mirafi reinforcement to ensure the stability of the design's four-tiered Anchor Diamond® walls. The walls rise at angles that vary from 4 to 12 degrees and reach 20 feet (6.1 meters) at the apex. From a distance, the completed walls



The rugged texture of the Anchor Diamond® block, perfected for this project by a stone carver, contributes to the impact of the impressive Wind Spirit Gateway sculpture in Wichita, Kansas.

resemble the hull of a boat, topped on either side by billowing steel sails and flanked by steel obelisks.

Since its unveiling, the sculpture has been well received by Wichita residents and visitors. "In my opinion, it's a beautiful project," Says D'Angelo. "When people see and experience the space, they enjoy it."

Additional photographs of this project and others by Robert Roesch are available at the artist's website, www.robertroesch.com. If you're thinking about visiting the sculpture in person, you can learn more about the city of Wichita at www.wichitakansas.org. 

Have you risen to the challenge with an Anchor retaining wall installation? Contact us at 800-473-4452, ext. 217 for consideration of your story in a future issue.