

SANDPOINT

MAGAZINE

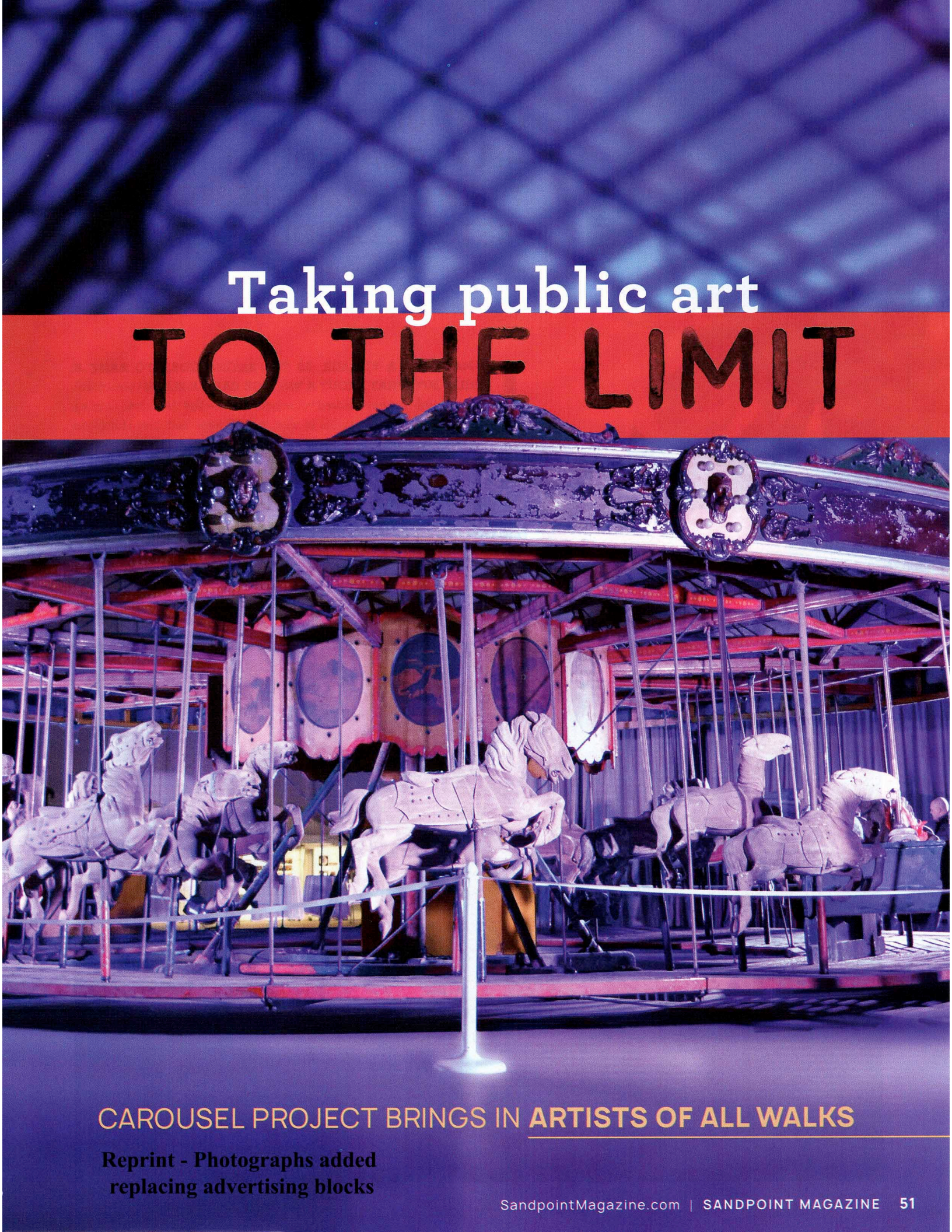
our mighty &
MAGNIFICENT
LAKE

SUMMER 2019

HIKING THE SELKIRK CREST
A 10-day journey over 16 peaks

A CAROUSEL OF SMILES
Local artists restore vintage ride

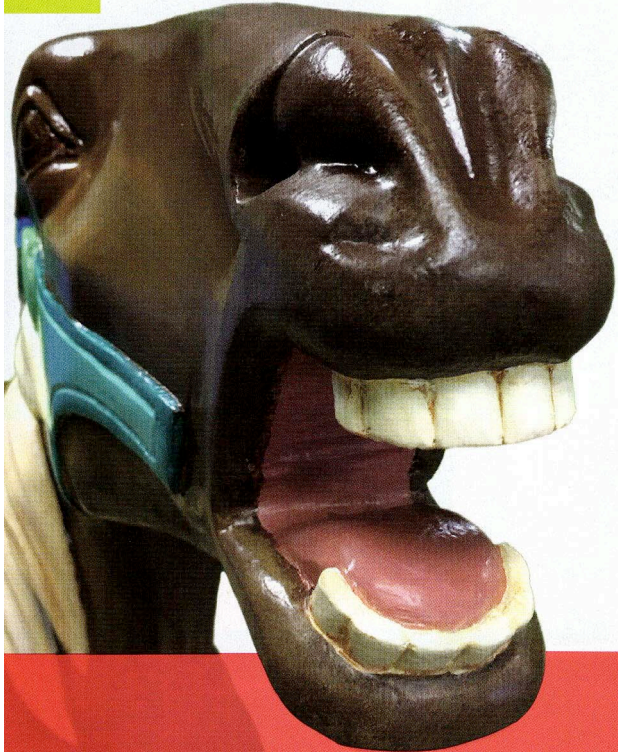
WOMEN OF CHANGE
Five who make a difference



Taking public art
TO THE LIMIT

CAROUSEL PROJECT BRINGS IN **ARTISTS OF ALL WALKS**

Reprint - Photographs added
replacing advertising blocks



NO DETAIL IN RESTORING THE PONIES IS OVERLOOKED; EVEN THEIR TEETH RECEIVE PAINSTAKING ATTENTION. FACING PAGE (FROM LEFT): ERIN CRAMER WORKS ON FINISHING DETAILS; DAVE SMITH IS ONE OF THE PONIES' "DENTISTS"; RENO HUTCHISON PAINTING ONE OF HER FAVORITE PONIES. PHOTOS BY CLAY HUTCHISON.

COMMUNITY PITCHES IN TO HELP LOCAL COUPLE REALIZE THEIR DREAM OF RESTORING HISTORIC CAROUSEL

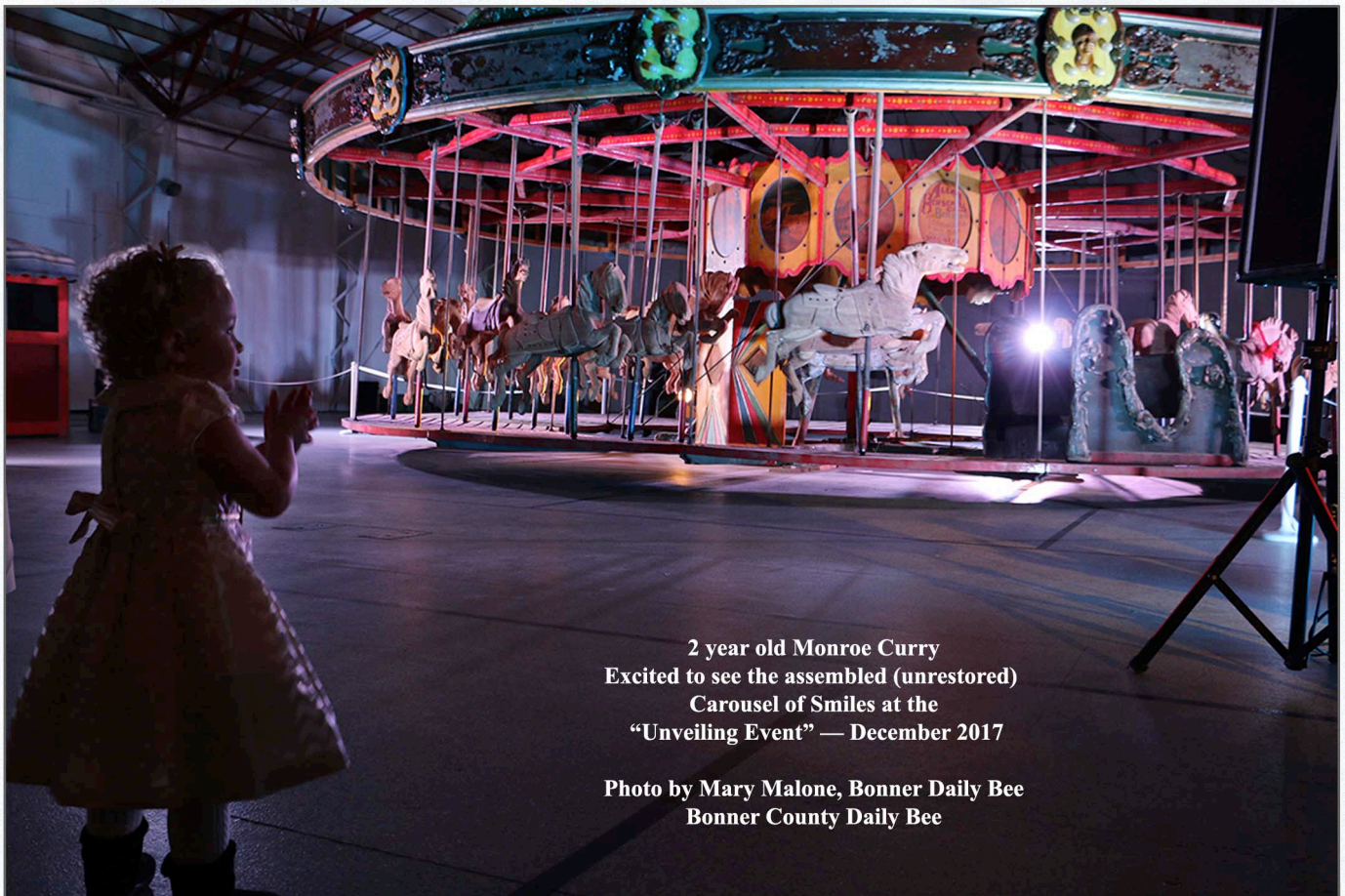
by Carrie Scozzaro

IT MAY TAKE A VILLAGE, AS THE SAYING GOES, TO RAISE A CHILD, BUT WHAT ABOUT A VINTAGE CAROUSEL? It's taken much of Sandpoint—several hundred volunteers to date—and then some to bring the Carousel of Smiles to life in what owners Reno and Clay Hutchison believe may be Idaho's largest public art project.

"One of the problems we've had is not being able to use all the people who want to help," said Clay.

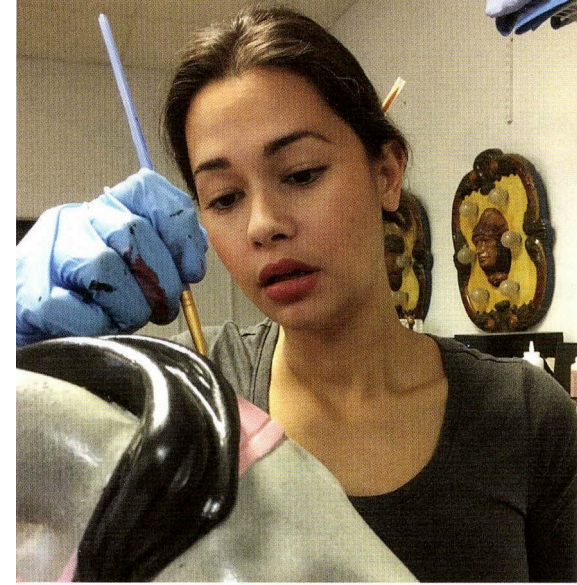
As anyone who has followed the narrative knows, the Hutchisons had been in pursuit of a carousel like the one in Reno's former hometown of Butte, Montana, which tragically burned down in 1973. The one they acquired and brought to Sandpoint two years ago was a 1920s exemplar of carver Allan Herschell's work, whose signature "Trojan" horse features a cropped mane and robust figure.

Clay figures the traveling carousel—it could be disassembled, packed and



2 year old Monroe Curry
Excited to see the assembled (unrestored)
Carousel of Smiles at the
"Unveiling Event" — December 2017

Photo by Mary Malone, Bonner Daily Bee
Bonner County Daily Bee



reassembled quickly for use in fairs and carnivals—was abandoned in 1952 in a farmer's field near Kansas City. That's where Clay's sister-in-law happened to be in 2000, visiting the family of the man who had acquired the Herschell model 30 years prior from the farmer, with the intent to restore it. It was kismet.

The Hutchisons had lucked out; so-called Golden Age carousels—hand-painted, hand-carved whimsies from the 1890s to 1920s—once numbered several thousand nationwide. Varying estimates put the remaining number at 150 to 200, with even fewer intact and still functional.

MANAGING THE HERD. Even before the ink was dry on newspaper articles announcing the December 2016 arrival of the carousel in Sandpoint, town was abuzz, with interest from people like Jan Griffitts, who now serves on the board of the registered 501(c)

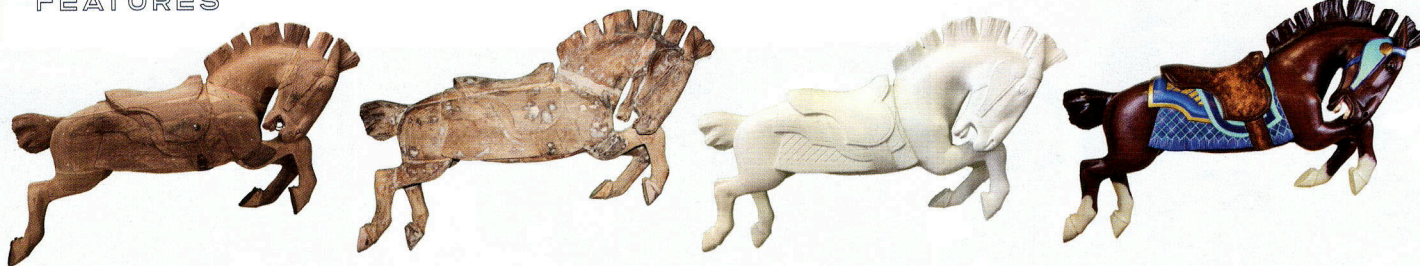
(3) nonprofit. More than 150 people witnessed the unpacking of two trailers in which the carousel's 36 horses, ticket booth, brass poles, art panels, and machinery had been hibernating since the carousel was abandoned in 1952.

Many artists enthusiastically offered support, including Gabe Gabel, a nationally-recognized horsewoman and sculptor who has since donated six wax horse maquettes from which bronzes can be made and sold. Valeria Yost created "Chasing a Dream," an original painting from which a limited edition of prints is being sold to support the carousel. Janene Grende has donated an original painting on silk, to be sold at a later auction.

More than 50 artists have expressed an interest in having their work incorporated into the 14 panels lining the interior of the classic amusement park ride. And while the Hutchisons are still mull-



The "Herd" is free, unloaded after 64 years of hibernation in their trailer. Photo by Clay Hutchison



ing over the creation of a rotating art display there (no pun intended), work is well under way on painting the ponies.

The group of 98 or so brush-wielding volunteers—dubbed “Painters of the Lost Art”—are being guided by Betty Largent, best known locally for her restoration work on Spokane’s Looff Carousel and in carousel circles as the president of the National Carousel Association.

After attending an October 2018 call-for-artists at the East Bonner County Library, having a hands-on opportunity with the carousel sounded good to artist Erin Cramer, who mostly uses her fingers to paint in oil on canvas.

“We just thought (the carousel) would be an awesome project for the whole family to be involved in,” said Cramer, who recruited her husband, mother-in-law, and father-in-law, who is a finish carpenter, to help restore and paint one of the ponies as a family project.

She’s looking forward to staying involved, she said, and admires the Hutchison’s passion for the carousel, which she described as infectious. “It just makes you super-excited to be involved.”

Before the ponies can be painted, however, they must be checked for structural integrity and restored by the 70-plus member “Godfather Squad,” so named because the horse’s heads must be cut off to remove interior metal and repair any damage, before they’re reassembled with the greatest of care. “Some are finding specific niches, for example,” said Clay, who notes that Dave Smith “is getting good at making replacement teeth for ones that are missing.” (Think dentures.)

As it turns out, the carousel animals need much more attention than the mechanism from which they’re suspended as they spin endlessly around.

“The carousel basically is and was totally functional, which makes it an incredible find,” said Ken Keeler, who heads up the Gear and Grease Gang. Lacking any assembly instructions, this group nevertheless assembled the carousel for its unveiling in 2017.

Keeler anticipates that the electrical and some other minor elements will need to be updated once a permanent site is determined and the carousel is reassembled for what many people—certainly the Hutchisons—hope is the herd’s new home in Sandpoint.

BEYOND THE NORTHWEST. As many volunteers as have come from Sandpoint and surrounding communities, the impact of the carousel extends beyond Bonner County. The Carousel of Smiles has generated interest from artists elsewhere in the Northwest, including Missoula, where a group of wood-carvers who were instrumental in carving the horses for A Carousel for Missoula asked to be involved. According to Reno, they quipped, “We’re a bunch of old guys with sharp tools and nothing to do.”

Aided by social media, the Hutchisons have been in touch with a collector in Washington, D.C. who has Allan Herschell manuals, and also with the great-grandson of Ward Oliver, who is credited with creating the faces on the rounding board shields, known as “The Four Winds.” They’ve shared the vision—18 horses done by the end of 2019, all work done in 2020 and installation commencing in 2021—locally and nationally, forging relationships with enthusiastic individuals and like-minded national organizations dedicated to preserving and promoting America’s iconic carousels.

Juta Geurtsen, community development director with the Idaho Commission on the Arts, is working with the Hutchisons on ways to be involved. “There is great creative and economic impact in this endeavor, and I am excited for the creative placemaking effect of a project of this size and scope, for the community of Sandpoint and for the state of Idaho.”

“We’ve created a whole new community (within a community),” said Reno.

Learn more at www.thecarouselofsmiles.org.

