Historic sculpture finds new home at Visitors Center

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LAFAYETTE — Artist Al LaVergne is gratified that his almost life-size sculpture, Miss Rose’s Bar, has finally found a permanent home.

"Today is one of the best reasons to consider Lafayette a special place," LaVergne said at a dedication ceremony before the sculpture was unveiled on the grounds of the Lafayette Convention and Visitors Commission.

"It shows that Lafayette is aware of its cultural diversity," he said, "and now a part of me is here."

The sculpture, 7 feet high, is made of fabricated steel and depicts a cheerful woman behind a bar pouring a drink for a laughing patron. The sculpture was originally displayed at the World’s Fair in New Orleans in 1984, LaVergne said, and was created while he was teaching art at Southern University.

In 1990, LaVergne, a graduate of Southern who received two master’s degrees in art from the University of California at Berkeley, accepted a position to teach sculpture at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo. He had done a lot of large sculptures, and had to find homes for them, along with Miss Rose’s Bar.

"I had a teacher in high school who said she always wanted an art center in Basile," LaVergne said. "So, I gave it to her to build her idea around it."

But LaVergne said his former teacher got cancer and died, and her husband wasn’t that interested in art and put it outside in a field. Then one day a young Lafayette man noticed the piece and secured it for a racetrack in Soleau, where people would stop and have glue which promoted community harmony. The sculpture is dedicated to the humanitarian contributions these bars made to American prosperity.

The installation of the sculpture was made possible by many people and organizations, said Visitors Commission Director Gerald Breaux. They include the Acadiana Arts Council, the Lafayette Consolidated Government, the Lafayette Convention and Visitors Commission and Lafayette Rotary North.

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their pictures made beside it, LaVergne said.

Eventually, it came to the attention of Lafayette businessman Phil Lank, whom LaVergne credits with creating the impetus to bring the sculpture to the Hub City.

LaVergne said the man and woman depicted in Miss Rose’s Bar are not real individuals, but symbolic of the lifestyle of blacks in Acadiana before the civil rights movement, when they created their own neighborhood connections.

“When there was a need to socialize or discuss current events, often the neighborhood bars, barbershops and churches were the only venues available to serve these interactions,” he wrote in a brochure on the sculpture. "These institutions were the