

Rosslyn Schultz – Bowl Plaza

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Have you ever visited a community that is flushed with pride – and I mean that literally? Today we'll learn about a rural community which is a center of grassroots art. The community's latest project involves, well, a toilet. It's today's Kansas Profile.

As we learned last week, Rosslyn Schultz is the director of the Grassroots Arts Center in Lucas, Kansas. The center features distinctive and unique works of art, usually created by retirees with no formal artistic training. These quirky works of art annually attract thousands of people from all across the nation and beyond.

One visitor said, "I could see these foil-lined walls with recycled sculptures in New York or California, but not in the middle of Kansas."

With all those visitors, something was needed: Public restroom facilities. While working on a grant, the community held a public meeting at which public restrooms were identified as a top priority.

But in keeping with Lucas's role in grassroots art, people also said, "It can't be a normal restroom. It's got to be quirky."

That led to plans for what has now been described as the world's most artsy public toilet. With help from a creative architect, several years of work from lead artists Mri-Pilar and Eric Abraham, and thousands of volunteer hours spearheaded by the Grassroots Arts Center, Lucas hosted a grand opening celebration of its new public restroom on June 2, 2012. What is the new restroom like? Well, it's quirky.

The restroom is set in what is called the Bowl Plaza which is shaped like a giant toilet with an oval shape sunk into the ground so that people can sit on the edge. A six foot porcelain artistic creation shows swirling water with items individuals have accidentally dropped into toilets. The 14 foot mosaic "lid" is always up. Inside the giant "tank" are sanitary facilities for men and women. A mock concrete giant toilet paper roll sits nearby and unfurls into the sidewalk. There's a giant hubcap handle created by Bob Mix, Great Bend grassroots artist. Maybe you can jiggle it to stop the imaginary water running.

The entire facility is a monument to mosaic grassroots art. Murals made with recycled materials are incorporated throughout the bowl plaza. The ladies' room is highlighted by a woman's tresses cascading on the walls, decorated with a refined feminine mosaic motif. The men's room is decorated with miniature cars, trucks, tractors, fishing, toys, game pieces, and more.

The fun didn't stop there. For the grand opening, and as a way to help defray the costs, the group auctioned off the opportunity to be the first person to flush the new toilet. The winning bid was \$430, and that person got the honor of the first official flush. In fact, the top bidders were treated like royalty - literally.

"We crowned `em," Rosslyn Schultz said. Paper crowns and flowing capes were given to the top bidders who walked to the bowl plaza in a formal procession. Of course, that makes this activity a, um, royal flush.

"It was kind of like a military wedding where the bride and groom walk under a line of drawn sabers," Rosslyn said. "Only we were holding up plungers and toilet bowl brushes," she said with a smile.

As was hoped, all this fun generated lots of attention. The guest register at the Bowl Plaza shows that visitors have come to this art attraction from 50 states and 47 countries -- very impressive for a rural community of 427 people. Now, that's rural.

For more information, go to www.grassrootsart.net.

Have you ever seen a community flushed with pride? Lucas, Kansas should be proud of its role as a grassroots art center. We salute Rosslyn Schultz and the people of Lucas for making a difference with offbeat creativity and fun, even in providing a public restroom. For example, here are some comments left by visitors: "Bowled me over," "Going in style," and "Super duper pooper!"

And there's more. One artist in Lucas has made a big success out of tiny things. We'll learn about that in the conclusion of our three part series next week.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.