

Art in Focus: The Groundbreaking

Jeannie Putnam · December 21, 2020



Photos provided

Artist: Arrin Matthews

The Groundbreaking

GJ: How were you contacted to create this piece?

AM: I entered the Mauldin Public Art Trail's search for a new art piece in 2018. This was open to all artists in South Carolina. The search was narrowed down to two finalists and was ultimately decided by a panel of judges who conducted interviews and viewed a small-scale sample of the sculptures.

GJ: What is the inspiration for this piece?

AM: The theme of the 2018 search was Industry of the Upstate. Inspiration for "The Groundbreaking" came from Mauldin's beginnings in the railroad industry. The railroad spikes used in the sculpture came from the railroad that helped build Mauldin. The large metal gears represent ties from Mauldin's past and current businesses. The focal point of the sculpture is a 9-foot-tall shovel, which reminds us that Mauldin is continually changing and growing, or breaking ground, in new ways.



GJ: What materials did you use to create this statue?

AM: The sculpture is made of mild steel and cast iron.

GJ: How long did it take to create? What was the creation process like?

AM: "The Groundbreaking" took approximately four months to create. The 9-foot-shovel was hand-constructed from a flat plate of steel and heated up to 1,500 degrees. Then, I was able to shape the spade of the shovel with hand hammers and dies into what you see today. The handle is made from a half-inch steel pipe that was textured with a power hammer to add lifelike details. A beam is used in the sculpture to represent the railroad, and actual railroad spikes are used to secure it to the base. The shovel and gears were welded to the base as well. Finally, a hand-drawn cityscape was painted onto the spade of the shovel.

GJ: What is your favorite part of the piece and why?

AM: My favorite part of the piece is the shovel. It could be fully functional despite its size. The size and skill that it took to create it by hand was my favorite part of this project.



GJ: When was it completed?

AM: The sculpture was installed and unveiled on Dec. 12, 2018.

Located on the Mauldin Public Art Trail, 101 E. Butler Road in Mauldin.

