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North Adams

Inaugural river display holds light for future

By Scott Stafford, Berkshire Eagle Staff

Article Last Updated: 04/29/2008 04:58:02 AM EDT

Tuesday, April 29

NORTH ADAMS — Two days after a crowd of about 3,000 showed up to view light sculptures suspended above the bed of the Hoosic River, city officials and organizers of the Hoosic River Lights project are thinking of ways to expand it for next year.

"It was an interesting trial run to show what it could look like," said Mayor John Barrett III. "I think a lot of people thought it was good even though it was done very quickly."

Ralph Brill, a local artist who conceived the idea and spent two years getting permission from the Army Corps of Engineers, then had about two months to put it all together.

The result was the installation of four pieces of illumination art conceived and built by four artists/groups in the floodway of the Hoosic east from The Porches Inn and past the Holden Street bridge.

Students at McCann Technical High School helped by welding a variety of pieces together, and a number of other local volunteers assisted in the actual installations.

About 10 Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute graduate students and artists Sarah Michael of

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designed the four pieces
over the river.

Billed to start at dusk and
end at 11 p.m., "hundreds
of people showed up
early, waiting for the lights
to come on, like at a
fireworks show," Brill said.
"And there was a good
cross section of folks. The
streets were packed."

Everything worked out, he
said.

"We had good weather, a
good crowd and good art,"
Brill said. "And now
people are talking about
filling the whole river with
light."

He said he already has
fielded calls from light artists in other countries who hope to have an opportunity to be
featured in the next Hoosic River Lights event. There are a few other light art events in
other parts of the world, but having one in a river is unique and offers unique challenges to
the artist, which is drawing some attention, he said.

"But it has to be done right," Brill added. "We will have time to do some things better, like
seeking more corporate sponsors, planning for more than one night and a longer stretch of
the river. We could draw as many as 10,000 people."

The dates of the event will be evaluated, along with what kinds of food vendors and other
kinds of street activities to offer. Adding roving musicians is an idea floating through the
discussions, as is the hope that downtown businesses can take part in some way.

"I think there is a good possibility they can build upon this," Barrett said. "It was a big draw
and brought a lot of people into the downtown and into the restaurants. So it's got
tremendous possibilities."

The synchronicity of having a light arts show in the river adjacent to Mass MoCA did not
escape the notice of museum officials.

"It was a good fit," said Brittany Bishop, Mass MoCA marketing coordinator. "We didn't have
a lot to do with it, but we did support their effort."

She said she was part of the viewing crowd.

Mass MoCA would support it again, she said, but to what extent would depend on what
was needed.