

PULSE

OF THE TWIN CITIES

Caponi Art Park

BY BETSY MOWRY

A reflection on sculptor Anthony (Tony) Caponi brings to mind the theory of "six degrees of separation"—that anyone can be connected to any other person in the world through a chain of five individuals.

Throughout Minnesota, and perhaps the world, you'll find someone who was taught or influenced by sculptor Anthony Caponi ... or who was taught by someone who was taught by him. For more than 80 years, Caponi has been a prolific sculptor and visionary, impacting lives with his powerful teaching style and his immense commitment to his art. A former chair of the art department at Macalester College in St. Paul, Caponi is best described as the "grandfather of stone carving" in Minnesota.

Presently, Caponi commits each day to his largest sculpture yet: The Caponi Art Park and Learning Center in Eagan. One of Minnesota's best kept secrets (but not for long), the park stretches over 60 acres of wooded land, creating a tranquil, protected haven amidst the town homes, strip malls and gas stations of the community. It has been a growing and evolving work of art under the callused hands of Caponi for more than 20 years.

Divided by Diffley Road in Eagan, the Caponi Art Park sprawls over the suburban, using the land itself as a medium to achieve a single, unified work of art. The grounds are an integral part of the exhibit and the sculptures become an inseparable part of the visual symphony. The rock walls and shaped earth are deliberate structures into which conventional works are integrated. The north side of the park, called the Sculpture Garden, consists of mossy, wooded trails that lead through acres of majestic oaks, birch and pines. The collection of Caponi's stone and metal sculptures provide an artistic and environmental retreat for wanderers.

On the south side of Diffley Road, nestled within a natural bowl, rests the Art Park's amphitheatre, the Theater in The Woods. The amphitheatre is one of the most unique in Minnesota and offers a 50-foot diameter stage and informal seating for up to 1,000 people. The park opened for tours and school groups in 1987, and since 1994 it has offered activities



Anthony Caponi and sculpture at Caponi Art Park in Eagan.

and performances by the region's top artists, including the "Summer Performance Series" and the "Family Fun Tuesdays."

On July 8 and 9, the Caponi Art Park is holding a "Re-grand Opening Event" to celebrate the completion of a new phase of the amphitheatre. Families, art and nature lovers are invited to bring a blanket and picnic, relax on the lush lawn and listen to some of Minnesota's most talented musicians. On Saturday, July 8, the Park welcomes the Dakota County Pops Orchestra and Chorale for a performance at 6:30 p.m. On Saturday, July 9, the Minnesota Sinfonia will perform at 7:30. Prior to each performance, writing and poetry from Caponi's memoir, "Voice from the Mountains," will be read. Both nights children's art projects will be available by Art Scraps. ||

Caponi Art Park and Learning Center is located at 1205 Diffley Rd., Eagan, 651-454-9412. The Park is open Tue. - Sun. 9 a.m. - dusk. There is a \$2 suggested donation. For more information go to caponiartpark.org.