



MORTON
UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 709

May 10, 2021

Morton mascot Clay becomes a work of art

Morton Junior High School unveiled a larger-than-life-size sculpture of District 709 mascot Clay at a Friday ceremony attended by the artist and the donors who made it happen.

Clay stands six and a half feet tall and is made of high-density Styrofoam surrounding an armature of steel tubes, welded together – a skeleton, essentially -- which was carved and then covered in six coats of epoxy. He will now occupy a



The artist and donors pose with Clay

permanent spot in the foyer outside “The Kiln,” MJHS’s impressive new gymnasium.

Clay was created by local artist Connie Andrews and commissioned through a donation from Phil and Barb Kuhl, the family behind Kuhl Insurance in Morton.

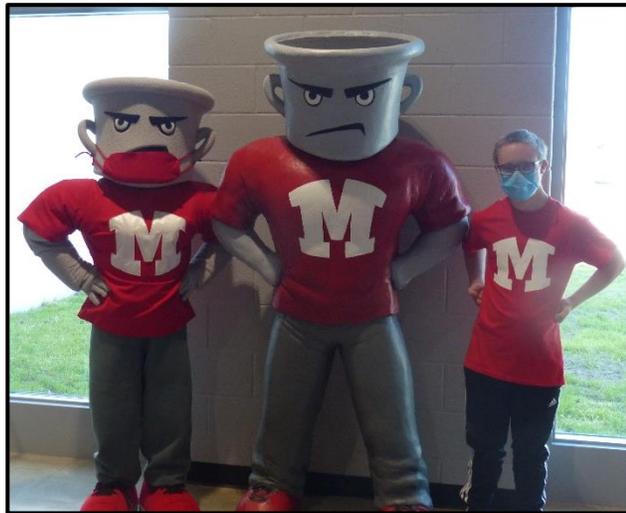
“I wanted something that would make the students feel powerful and proud of their school. That’s why I put him in the Superman pose,” said Andrews, who works out of a home studio in Morton.

“Oh, look at that! Unbelievable,” said Phil Kuhl upon first planting eyes on the artwork on Friday. “Let’s hope Clay brings a lot of wins to our Junior High,” while

also encouraging students “to be nice to each other and to pursue their educations.”

The Kuhls have long been major supporters of the community – they were a driving force behind the creation of the Morton Community Foundation 20 years ago – and of the school district that educated their three children and five grandchildren, the latter now ages 20 to 24.

Indeed, they involve their grandchildren in the decision-making for their philanthropic foundation. They have a budget, they familiarize themselves with the causes the family holds dear, and in this cycle of funding, Clay became a priority.



The real Clay, the sculpture Clay, and superfan Bo Gill

The message that really resonates with the Kuhls is that “we don’t do much ourselves, really. The most significant things we do are that we teach somebody else,” said Mr. Kuhl. “Somebody taught us everything we know. We are indebted every day to them.”

Morton school officials couldn’t be more pleased and thankful that the Kuhls have made District 709 a place to help pay their success forward



Morton Junior High’s new gym, ‘The Kiln’

Junior High Principal Lee Hoffman also had high praise for his assistant principal and athletic director, Chris Carter, who originated the concept for Clay the Sculpture, saw to all the details, and made the grant application.

Not only is Clay an iconic representation of the district’s desire to “spread community pride and Potter pride,” but

“it’s really the cherry on top” of the recent investments in the junior high facility, including the state-of-the-art gym, said Mr. Hoffman.

In opening remarks, Mr. Carter shared the history behind the project, which goes back about seven years with the redesign of the mascot and logo – courtesy of the imagination of graphic designer Andrew Pfeifer (MHS Class of 1998) – culminating in a college visit with his daughter in 2018 to the University of Missouri, where the family became familiar with the mascot, Truman, the Tiger.



Athletic Director Chris Carter about to introduce Clay

Morton schools adopted the “Potter” nickname in the 1940s, in homage to the community’s rich tradition in the pottery industry. Clay has served as mascot and chief cheerleader since 2007, and has proven “wildly popular” as a Morton emblem, said Mr. Carter.



The real Clay readies to rumble

“Connie created everything I had in my mind, but somehow couldn’t explain.” The result, he said, is “perfect.

“It’s a good day to be a junior Potter.”

The addition of Clay, the artwork, is one more example of why Morton is “a great place to live and work and do business,” said Scott Witzig, executive director of the Morton Community Foundation.

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