



Arnoldo Cardenas cleans the terrazzo floor inlaid with 2,200 to 2,500 laminated glass discs, such as those shown below, at the new Chapel Hill Aquatic Center.

STAFF PHOTOS BY HARRY LYNCH

TOWN'S IN THE SWIM WITH PUBLIC ART

BY SADIA LATIFI
STAFF WRITER

CHAPEL HILL - Glass and light artist Ray King has spent five years on his latest project.

He has submitted and resubmitted plans to the town, constructed more than 2,000 light-responsive, laminated glass cylinders over five months, and worked 12-hour days to complete the terrazzo floor installation.

Now, he wants nothing more than for people to walk all over it.

King completed his piece, "Eddies of Light," this week at the new Chapel Hill Aquatic Center in Homestead Community Park off Homestead Road. The glass cylinders set into the floor



of the sunlit main lobby reflect color to mimic the appearance of walking on light. The \$55,000 project was funded in part through the town of Chapel Hill's Percent for Art Ordinance, which allocates 1 percent of selected capital projects for public art.

"It's a democratic artwork. Everybody is going to come in, and they're all going to walk across the floor," King said. "Just by moving, you're going to experience art."

Chapel Hill is one of three North Carolina municipalities with percent-for-art ordinances.

SEE ART, PAGE 4B

Triangle & Co.

www.newsobserver.com/news

ART

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

Charlotte and Asheville are the others, said Jeffrey York, the town's public arts administrator.

York said many people mistakenly think the money for the program comes from a special tax. In reality, funds come off the top of selected capital projects, such as the aquatic center.

The center cost \$6.5 million and was funded from Chapel Hill and Orange County bonds. It is expected to open in the fall.

York acknowledges that some residents think the money could have been put to better use.

"People have said, 'It's absolutely beautiful, but so what?'" he said. "Look at the opening cere-



King: 'Art shouldn't be elitist, and it's not a mystery.'

PERCENT FOR ART

The Chapel Hill Town Council established the Town's Percent for Art Ordinance in 2002. This ordinance allocates 1 percent of selected capital projects for the creation, construction, installation and maintenance of permanent works of public art. Funding comes from each project's construction budget, which can include federal, state, county, town and private support.

mony of the Olympics. Do we say, 'So what?'

"Certainly you don't have to have this on the floor, and you can be totally utilitarian, but if you can have something of beauty that people can derive pleasure from, then why not?"

Entrepreneur Gene Pease led an advisory committee that reviewed the town budget for possible savings three years ago. He said the committee looked at the public art program but couldn't reach consensus.

"It was a philosophical difference," he said. "Some felt that the town should not be engaged in funding non-critical services, and

some felt that public art was as vital as parks and recreation.

"I am a big supporter of it as long as it's in public areas and visible and able to be used in the public," Pease said. Public art installed at the new Town Operations Center on the northern edge of town is not very public, he said.

At the Aquatic Center, the floor mosaic relies on natural light, and the colors and images it reflects will change with the sun's movements during the day.

King, who is from Philadelphia, has worked on public art projects in New York, Alaska, Florida and other states. He said he has seen the difference it can make in a community.

"People start to recognize the design and quality and how they see the town changes," he said. "It adds to the cultural network of the town. Art shouldn't be elitist, and it's not a mystery.

"Once you get past sticker shock, you find it's worth it more and more," he said.

sadia.latifi@newsobserver
or (919) 829-4768