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ARTIST WAIVES HIS FEE

Sculpture for hotel to become public art

Tacoma's reputation in the world of glass helps snare a major piece of art for outside Hotel Murano. The city will chip in \$110,000.

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BY JASON HAGEY
The News Tribune

It'll be one big dipper. Tacoma never got its spire, a giant tower once planned as part of the city's downtown convention center. That icon that never was was done in by its vague sense of purpose and a soaring price tag that eventually hit \$7 million. **Back page**

TAKE A LOOK
See an artist's rendering of how the Horizon sculpture will look.

Now plans are emerging for a 104-foot, steel-and-glass sculpture that could become the city's newest landmark. Renowned Greek artist Costas Varotsos has designed a sculpture resembling a dipper filled with water as part of the Sheraton Tacoma Hotel's \$20 million transformation into the glass-art-themed Hotel Murano.

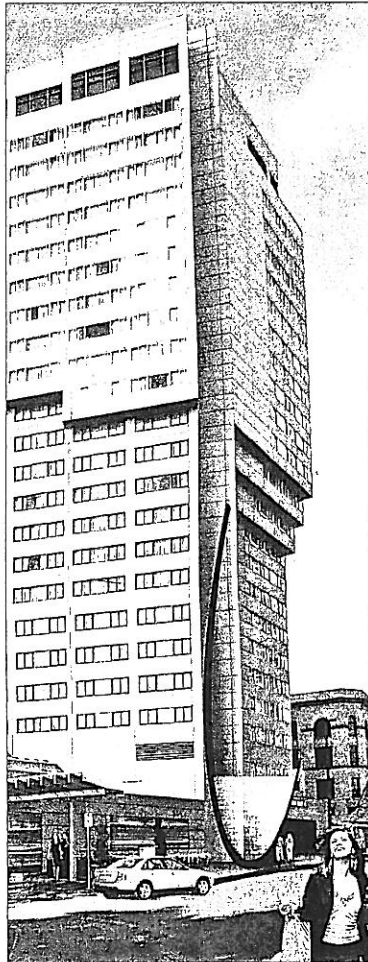
The piece will sit on the sidewalk along Broadway, in front of the hotel.

The sculpture will be another in Varotsos' "Horizon" series, said Tessa Papas, art curator for the Hotel Murano. It's as if someone scooped up the horizon from the waters of Commencement Bay and set it down in front of the hotel, she said.

The idea for the artwork came from the hotel owners, but it's destined to become a piece of public art.

Council members approved a resolution Tuesday authorizing the city to spend \$110,000 from its general fund as a "donation fee" to acquire the sculpture from the hotel once it's finished. That's a small fraction of what it will cost to build it. Varotsos is waiving his artist fee, but KS Tacoma Hotel LLC will spend approximately \$700,000 for construction of the piece. It could be worth as much as \$2 million when it's finished, Papas said.

City officials called the planned artwork a spectacular gift to the city and predicted it will become a tourist draw. The sculpture fits with the redesigned hotel's glass theme, which features a different glass artist on each floor, as well as 13 glass works in the lobby. The Sheraton



Hotel Murano

An artist's rendering shows Costas Varotsos' sculpture for the new Hotel Murano in Tacoma.

SCULPTURE

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will become Hotel Murano on Dec. 29. (Murano is an area near Venice that's the center of Italian glass art.)

City Manager Eric Anderson said the art will provide a connection between Tacoma's convention center, museums and the theater district. "I believe it will be an important icon for the City of Tacoma," he said.

Council members were mostly enthusiastic about the sculpture, but they expressed some concern about the cost of maintaining it and the potential for something to go wrong. Councilman Tom Stenger, who voted against the resolution, reminded his colleagues of the ill-fated Water Forest, a bronze and glass fountain sculpture that stood briefly outside the Museum of Glass until it was broken by a boy. More than five years later, officials haven't figured out how to redesign it in a way that will protect it from future damage and still preserve its original essence.

Stenger also noted that the Bridge of Glass was touted as being bullet-proof before it opened, and yet was damaged by gunfire soon after opening. And he harkened back to the public outcry in the early 1980s over artist Stephen Antonakos' neon art at the Tacoma Dome. The neon, which was originally intended to go on the outside of the Dome's roof, was the subject of much public debate. Stenger said he wanted more public discussion of the Varotsos sculpture.

But Councilwoman Julie Anderson said the sculp-

ture is different because it wasn't commissioned by the city. Anderson also noted that the city's Arts Commission reviewed the plans and recommended accepting the sculpture into the city's Municipal Art Collection.

Mayor Bill Baarsma said Tacoma is a different city than it was during the neon art controversy. "In my view, we've come a long way from 1983," he said.

Varotsos is known for creating site-specific monumental sculptures. Papas encountered his work "The Runner" when she lived in Greece, though she didn't know who the artist was. "There was this incredible sculpture, all plate glass," she said. "It intrigued me."

Last year, after the hotel owners asked her to put together a collection, Papas decided to track down the artist who created the sculpture and ended up traveling to Athens to meet with Varotsos.

He agreed to design a sculpture and to waive his fee. "I think he was intrigued that I tracked him down," Papas said, adding, "He's really excited about what we're doing."

The steel portion of the work is already being fabricated in Portland, and the sculpture could be in place by mid-February.

Other glass artists are intrigued with the hotel's makeover as well. Nearly 50 internationally known artists will have pieces displayed in the hotel, Papas said. "In certain circles, Tacoma is well-known," she said.

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