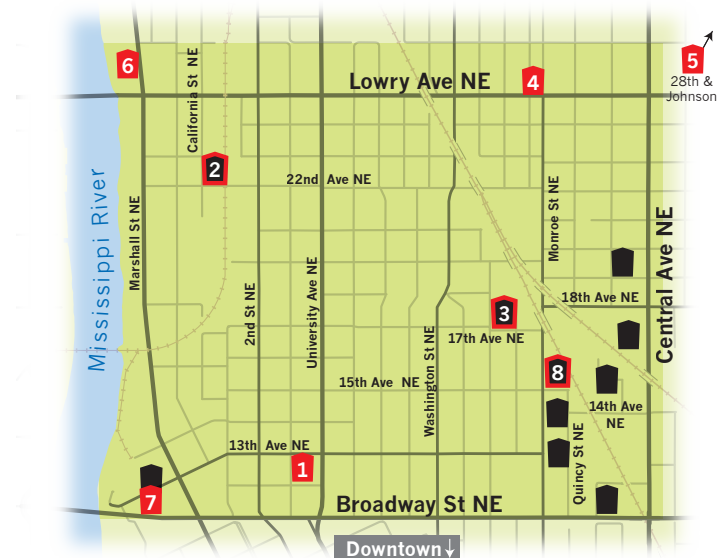




# arts INSIGHTS

A page about artists and The Arts at Work by the Northeast Minneapolis Arts District in collaboration with the Northeaster.



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Council members Steve Fletcher, Andrea Jenkins, Jeremy Schroeder, Lisa Bender and Mayor Jacob Frey, with Aldo Moroni holding the city proclamation. (Photo by Mark Peterson)

## City honors Aldo Moroni

by Mark Peterson

In the 48 years since a train brought this budding art student from his native Chicago to Minneapolis, Aldo Moroni has made a remarkable career as an artist and community builder. On December 13, the Minneapolis City Council recognized what many in Northeast have long known of this treasure, presenting a resolution honoring Moroni in a joyful and at times poignant ceremony.

This past November, Moroni addressed a packed gallery in the California Building about the progress of his “Mesoamerica” project, a large sculptural set of pieces about Mexican civilization. He noted that his recent diagnosis of late-stage pancreatic cancer means that his project will need to be “finished by others.”

Before the presentation of the resolution, fellow artists and friends, of whom Moroni seems to have an endless supply, filled a conference room next to the Mayor’s office. Well-wishers were jammed against a long table loaded with exotic pastries and coffee urns, and the major activities were taking selfies and exchanging handshakes and hugs. At 9:30, the crowd walked to the nearby City Council chambers, where the standing-room-only atmosphere felt like a political rally for a really nice candidate.

Northeast City Council members Kevin Reich and Steve Fletcher spoke first. Reich called Moroni, “Truly the personification of a public artist in the most grounded and authentic sense.”

Fletcher said, to much laughter, “Aldo, this is a real testament to you. There are very few people who can get the arts community to show up at City Hall, and there are very few people who can get the arts community to show up anywhere at 9 a.m.” He added, “We reflect on your work and how powerful it is to add work to the public space that contributes to change ... and really honors what’s special about our history; that grabs what’s so special about the different moments in time; and brings them into continuity with others, in ways that I appreciate so much. And I think it’s so symbolic of the direction our city is moving, and in line with the way the city thinks about itself.”

Fletcher then read the resolution, which ended with: “Whereas: Aldo Moroni has worked for decades at the intersection of artmaking and community building, bringing a generous and people-centered aesthetic to every project, and every partner, from small neighborhood block groups to large formal organizations; and captured the built environment of Minneapolis through his art and preserved it for generations; the Mayor and City Council, in recognition of his commitment to building community, sparking joy, and forging connections between people and places through public art over the course of his distinguished career, do hereby present this resolution to Aldo Moroni together with their most sincere thanks, appreciation, and gratitude.”

Mayor Jacob Frey joked that Moroni’s somewhat spiffed-up appearance surprised him: “I didn’t know you

owned a jacket or a tie. But seriously, it’s such a great honor to have this legend in City Hall, a force of life and a force of nature ... who has quite literally been at the forefront of depicting and guiding the arts community in Northeast, yes, but also in the city of Minneapolis. I remember that when I first met you, we were arguing for affordable housing, and for artists to make sure they could stay in the community. This is back when it wasn’t popular to advocate for the A Mill, for affordable housing and the historical preservation that went along with it. But Aldo, as usual, was at the forefront. He has become almost synonymous with the history of our city. But the unique thing about his art is that while it is predominantly buildings, he somehow finds a way to make it about people. Aldo, you have a legacy here. We love you dearly, and in so many respects you’re the sun, and we’re just a bunch of flowers bent to get a little more of your light.”

Moroni seemed clearly moved, saying, “Wow – this is overwhelming! I know 99% of the people here and those I don’t know can come say hello, and then I’ll know you, too. When I came here, I decided that Minneapolis would be my home. I made the right choice. It’s like true love: You pick your partner, and everything’s going to be gold. Well, in my life, sometimes that didn’t work out; but in the relationship with my community, and the people around me, it’s worked out.”

“You have made me what I am. If I’ve had any successes at all, or made anything that’s meaningful to anyone, it’s because of the community I’m part of. I’m quite sure that if I hadn’t come to Minnesota, none of this would have happened. I’ve been very lucky, very blessed, and I feel a lot of love. You all know my situation, but the rule is: no worry. As for the next thing, we’re going to fly there; we’re going to do it joyfully. We did well. We did good work, and we had fun. I’m kind of vaguely looking forward to the next place; I hope they have a nice studio.”

As he was joined by his twin sons, Moroni added, “This day is overwhelming, and I want to thank you all for coming out, but also for years and years of putting up with my nonsense and insanities, and all the things that we’ve done. Mary Altman and I have been together on this for a very long time and we are truly enriched by the programs here, and I know this is a national model for other places. I work a couple of hours a day, I have the best crew in the world, and my at-home helpers Maxie and Marie are the best people in the world to be doing that. I’m not at all worried, and you shouldn’t worry, either. It’s going to be a beautiful ride, and it’s gonna be OK. But it’s BYOB at the final memorial.”

The next day, Moroni was at his California Building studio, greeting people, showing off work for sale, and clambering over his tabletop sculpture to add more little clay artifacts to the sprawling landscapes. His energy seemed not in the least diminished, a fact he noted by saying, “We still have to pay the rent!”

## New year off & running

Happy new year from the Northeast Minneapolis Arts District board! The board has been busy since last report.

- We collaborated with several neighborhood groups on a **forum for the 60A Minnesota House of Representatives seat** focusing on arts and neighborhoods Jan. 13. We remind and encourage everyone to vote for the candidate of their choice in the January 21 primary, and then in the general election Feb. 4 when there will be only two on the ballot.
- The **2020 SNO Ball** is Saturday, February 8, 7 pm to midnight at the FOOD Building, 1401 Marshall St. NE. It will have a Roaring 20’s theme. A portion of the proceeds from the event, put on by Sheridan Neighborhood Organization, will benefit the Arts District. We encourage all who follow the arts to attend for a great time dancing with the Ring Toss Twins, adult beverages and good eats, silent auction, photo booth. SNO has always put on a lovely party, attended not only by residents of the neighborhood, but friends from all over. This is a 21+ event, costumes optional but



encouraged. Ticket info (\$30 in advance, \$35 at the door) at: <https://www.sheridanneighborhood.org/events/sno-ball-2020>

- When you see the **ART365** signs on the street, stop in. Working artist studios, galleries and art businesses are taking turns being featured each day from noon to 5. Sometimes the day’s feature will be multi-building *evening* events like First Thursday. Details on artists participating in ART365 can be found on page 16 of this Northeaster and at [www.northeastminneapolisartsdistrict.org/calendar](http://www.northeastminneapolisartsdistrict.org/calendar).

• **Ginny Sutton** is the new coordinator of ART365, working with Margo Ashmore and the rest of the board to schedule the days and build awareness of this resource. Ginny was a long-time member of the Eastside Food Co-op board of directors and brings a gentle, cooperative spirit. Forever an arts fan, she said she is looking forward to having this excuse to be further immersed in the arts community. *Photo by Jeff Skemp*



Ginny Sutton

- **Arts District News**, our monthly emailed newsletter, has a new, cleaner format. Subscribe at [northeastminneapolisartsdistrict.org](http://northeastminneapolisartsdistrict.org).

- Two long-term exhibits at the **Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport** will feature the District as a destination and promote its arts and artists through displays of work. The first exhibit is slated for late 2020 with a second exhibit to commence in early 2021. The ARTS@MSP program is supported by the Airport Foundation.

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