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Irving's dream location is the northwest corner of College and University.

GIANT SEEKS HOME

By Sarah B. Hood

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Visitors to Little India may wonder, as they glance north up Rhodes Avenue from Gerrard East, why a neighbourhood resident is storing a 4,000-pound bronze figure on skids in his front yard.

Well, in 1990, while standing in front of the Vietnam War Memorial, sculptor and psycho-therapist Michael Irving conceived a grand-scale monument to the survivors of child-hood abuse. His vision: *Reaching Out*, a massive archway-shaped bronze public artwork consisting of two 11-foot figures with outstretched arms.

Between 1996 and 2003, Irving created 300 "quilt squares" based on wax-modelled individual hand-prints and symbolic images contributed by abuse survivors and their supporters across Canada. Among the contributors are people we've heard of, including Sylvia Fraser (author of *In My Father's House*) and some of the young men abused at Maple Leaf Gardens. Most handprints are from anonymous contributors: a 70-year-old woman, a Vietnam vet, native youth from Alberta and Saskatchewan, infants whose parents' lives had been affected by abuse.

The first figure, completed on Sept. 14 of this year, is embellished with 150 squares. Its mate is expected to arrive in late 2009, depending on fundraising (a further $400,000 is required to complete it).

In 1999, Irving was offered a space outside the Air Canada Centre, but development plans for the area have changed, so the sculpture inhabits his front yard while he seeks a permanent home. Irving's dream location is the northwest corner of College and University, where the University of Toronto green-house used to stand, and he's negotiating with Queen's Park to get permission to use it.

"Visually, that's the right space for it. The parkette setting is so public, and yet you can almost be private on this corner. The paradox of this sculpture is that it has to be public so people will see it, and it has to be private so people can grieve," he says.

"It's at the hub of education and healing and government. In a sense, it's a place that is close to the stakeholders. We have the war, police and fire memorials -- the heroes -- and then there are the heroic children who have come through these adversities. In that location, it completes the circle."

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