

Holy Cow! A Popular Landmark Returns to the Avenue

By Paula Martinac

The Bulletin

If you've missed the cow that has stood quietly grazing behind the gate of the house at 5018 Penn Avenue in Bloomfield for the past three years, don't worry – it wasn't stolen; it was just getting a makeover. As of June 12, the painted wooden bovine cutout is back at home, following a careful restoration to undo the negative effects of Pittsburgh's wet weather.

The cow art belongs to Bill Cornell, a member of the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation's board of directors, who bought the house on Penn three years ago from artist Sigrid Shafagh. You know the house – it has a quirky curved iron fence, which was one of the first major projects in the area done by Red Star, Pittsburgh's custom iron-work studio. "I love living here," remarks Cornell, "and I love the neighborhood."

Cornell purchased the cow art 25 years ago, when he and his then-wife were on a trip through Vermont. "We saw about four cows standing in somebody's yard," Cornell relates, "and we didn't even realize at first that they were wood."

Eventually, they tracked down the local artist, Woody Jackson, who had

made a specialty of painting Holsteins. The cow cost them about \$300 – "a lot of money for us at the time," Cornell notes, so friends pitched in to give it to them as a Christmas present. Cornell had been buying art since he was in college and got the collecting bug.

At about the same time that Cornell purchased the cutout, Jackson, the artist, was on the verge of a breakout sale. He'd been approached by a man named Ben Cohen, who wanted him to create a billboard for his company – a little ice cream shop in a former gas station in Burlington, Vermont, called "Ben & Jerry's." On his website, Jackson writes that "the cows gave B&J's an instantly powerful trademark which has helped the ice cream guys to become world-renowned. It hasn't hurt me, either."

For many years, while Cornell and his family lived in an 1825 farmhouse in Gibsonia, Pa., the cow had "a sheltered life," says the owner; it sat indoors, just staring out a window. When Cornell moved to the city, she became an outdoor cow – but at a cost. "The base was getting beat up," says Cornell, "and I was worried about rot."

To restore the artwork, Cornell engaged the talents of Highland Park



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artist Nathan Hall, who had also worked on transforming the interior of Cornell's house from an artist's studio to comfortable living space. Hall, whom Cornell describes as "a very skilled and careful craftsman," reglued and repainted the cutout, and "sealed it with a magic 'something'" to prevent further deterioration.

Neighbors have been dropping by

to welcome the cow back to the avenue, as it has become a neighborhood fixture. "People have always stopped to see it, because it's right by the bus stop," notes Cornell. "It's been decorated for the holidays. Once, someone even kissed her on the head, and she had a big red lipstick mark."