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## **Sculptor's horizons are as big as the sky**

### **NEIGHBORS**

By **JAMIE DUFFY**  
FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

\* Name: John Proano

\* Age: 21

\* Hometown: Hackettstown

\* A work of art: Proano has just completed his first large outdoor commission, a 10-foot-high steel sculpture titled "Reaching for the Sky."

\* Family: Wife, Maria Fernanda; infant daughter, Isabella.

\* A sculpture is commissioned: Proano walked collector Henry Riewerts' farm in Asbury, a section of Franklin Township, Warren County, until he found inspiration in the hills and sky.

"I wanted to absorb the surrounding area. It was very open to the sky. When I started crafting the concepts, that was the idea. It was something that had to reach out to the sky," Proano said.

In mid-January, the sculpture was transported and installed on a hillock.

Navajo red begins the color spectrum at the bottom of the piece and runs vertically through the colors of the fall foliage from dark orange to citrus orange to yellow.

Riewerts told Proano the sculpture "didn't have to be huge, had to have some color to it," when the two met last summer.

"I thought he had the capacity to use his imagination and come up with something that would fit with the different sites we were talking about," Riewerts said.

\* A child of Colombia: Proano came up with some preliminary sketches and Riewerts chose one. Sketching is something Proano has been doing ever since he can remember.

A child of Cali, Colombia, he came to New Jersey when he was 10 years old. His family settled in Mine Hill, and then moved to Dover.

He was a member of the football team at Dover High School when it won the state championship.

He still likes to play basketball in the summer and soccer when he and his pals "get together and pick a field."

\* A new life: His life changed when he enrolled in a sculpting course at the County College of Morris. After he produced his first steel sculpture, the dean of the graphic arts department bought it.

Proano was even more encouraged when she told him the "sculpture could easily be in an art gallery or an art museum," he said.

After completing the second course, he sold "Time and Space 2," which is still on display at the Clibrary.

The inspiration for the sculpture and subsequent pieces began at the foundry where his stepfather worked.

"It was a metal forging company. I always saw lots of cool stuff there," Proano said.

Proano welds metal pieces together, and then smoothes and cleans them for painting.

The most durable paint he has found is automotive, something he applied to his most recent work, working side by side with mechanics in a Hackettstown automotive shop where he rents space.

\* Endless possibilities: After his graduation from county college, Proano went to work as a graphic arts designer, but never gave up the idea of continuing his work in steel.

In 2000, he was settled enough to enroll at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan, particularly relishing instruction from another sculptor, Andrew Ginzel.

"I really found an area of art I enjoy. The possibilities are endless," says Proano.

**PHOTO CAPTION:** 1. Hackettstown sculptor John Proano with his sculpture, "Reaching for the Sky," in Asbury, Warren County. Proano was commissioned by collector Henry Riewerts of Asbury to create the sculpture on his farm. **CREDIT:** 1. TYLER BARRICK/FOR THE STAR-LEDGER



