Public Art Inspires Downtown Toms River

By: Victoria Ford



Alizar Zorojew.
Photo credit: C & H Staff

Helping to bring a fresh new energy to revitalization efforts already underway in Downtown Toms River is Alizar Nicholas Achmed Zorojew, who stepped into the Executive Director role for the Business Improvement District on May 2. His path to that post led from volunteer board member and Cultural Director, representing the Toms River Seaport Society and Maritime Museum and the Toms River Artist Community, chairing the Wooden Boat Festival and helping to run the ever-popular Art in the Park. He served the BID under Bill Golkiewicz, then became a member of the executive committee.

Guiding him on his path the whole way to the directorship has been his abiding love for downtown Toms River.

"I like to say I know the cracks in the sidewalks," he said – the very same sidewalks down which he rode his bike and his skateboard as a kid.

Events bring thousands of people downtown, a fact that benefits businesses and residents. Those who say "nothing goes on" in Toms River are overlooking the weekly farmers market (each Wednesday from just before Memorial Day to just before Thanksgiving), Cruisin' Downtown (second Wednesday of the month throughout the summer), the many art classes and workshops and opportunities to explore, learn and grow. But the real shame would be missing out on the creative vibe in the air – a growing momentum, a certain readiness in a community poised for the next big thing.

Enter Zorojew. The 30-year-old has a marketing degree, an MBA and a CMFO (Certified Municipal Finance Officer) license, not to mention a wealth of community-minded volunteer and nonprofit experience, and he's putting all of those skills to good use in his new position.

He and Marketing Director Kim Dippolito, who does a lot of the legwork for the various events, are two full-timers at the BID, along with Administrative Assistant Arlene Read, Executive Assistant Liz Thompson and Buildings and Grounds Manager Ed Riley. Among his daily responsibilities Zorojew thinks of himself as a shepherd for businesses. A liaison between business owners and local government in the processes of obtaining permits and navigating other bureaucratic terrain, he facilitates hoop-jumping. He also works to fill storefronts, to some extent recruiting businesses to the area with an eye toward striking the right balance. Meanwhile, what Zorojew described as an extremely active volunteer board of directors with a wide variety of different perspectives and assets works to find and understand

Continued on page 8

Public Art Inspires from page 7



Weeping Angel Statue.
Photo credit: Brian Hanlon Studio

the town's needs and how to fulfill them.

On the immediate horizon is the installation of a new public exhibit of the work of world-renowned sculptor and Toms River resident Brian Hanlon. The show will embody the "Summer of Sports, Fitness and Wellness" theme that coincides with the town's proclamation and the Ocean County Library's summer reading program.

"It's on," Zorojew said.

By mid-May, the spots had been laid out in preparation for installation in the first week of June. The unveiling would be June 7 at noon at the municipal complex. The statues, some resin and some bronze, 20 in total, would be concentrated in the areas of the municipal building, the library, the courthouse, the Seaport and the new park next to Capone's. Many represent the sports and fitness theme, so they are athletes, coaches, team owners (Shaquille O'Neal, Yogi Berra, Larry Holmes), and some well-known civic leaders and activists, according to Zorojew.

Another important ongoing endeavor is the Community Arts Project, or CAP, guided by a consortium comprising the BID, the Jay and Linda Grunin Foundation and the Ocean County Vocational-Technical Schools. Outgrowths of the CAP include large-scale murals and other works that get art "out there" for everyone to appreciate, he explained.

"I want to see more murals," Zorojew said. A wall inventory catalogs the spots with the best visibility and potential for eye-catching scenes. Each wall is unique in its makeup and offerings and the owner's particular contributions.'

This summer, local painter Jim Houba will give the side of the Seaport's boat shed an indigenous boat scene featuring vessels historically used on local waterways. It's a mutually beneficial arrangement wherein the Seaport pays Houba for his work and the TRAC provides him with the supplies, Zorojew explained. It puts "color on the streets," he said.

Coming up on July 16, the event formerly known as the Ice Cream Festival will transform into Summer in the Streets. The all-day summer fest will integrate the ideas of physical activity during the day, with streets closed to vehicle traffic in favor of creating a downtown route for human-powered machines such as bikes, skates and strollers, meanwhile fitness and wellness-oriented businesses and organizations line the route with information, activities, goods and services; and, as Zorojew envisions it, will carry over into a more party-like atmosphere in the evening with live performances by notable local acts along the lines of (though unconfirmed at press time) rock duo Brick + Mortar and Joe Michelini from the now-defunct River City Extension.