

Celestial Landmarks

By BILL MORGAN

AN OLD MASTER craftsman and a new church have gotten together to give North Dallas a work of art that could stand as a landmark for years to come.

The craftsman is Joe Nestrole, an intense little 61-year-old man who has devoted his life to banging hard steel into pleasing and functional shapes.

The church is Our Redeemer Lutheran at 7611 Park Lane and its modern new building is capped by four 12-foot-tall archangels blowing trumpets. The angels and trumpets are arranged to give the impression of a cross when viewed at any angle from a distance.

"This was the concept of our architect (Eugene Wukasch of Austin)," explained Our Redeemer's pastor, the Rev. Frederick Mattil. "The angels are symbolically blowing their trumpets to the four points of the compass."

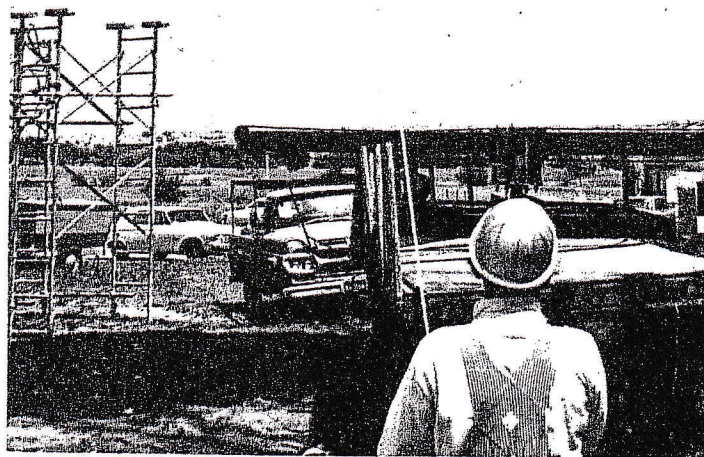
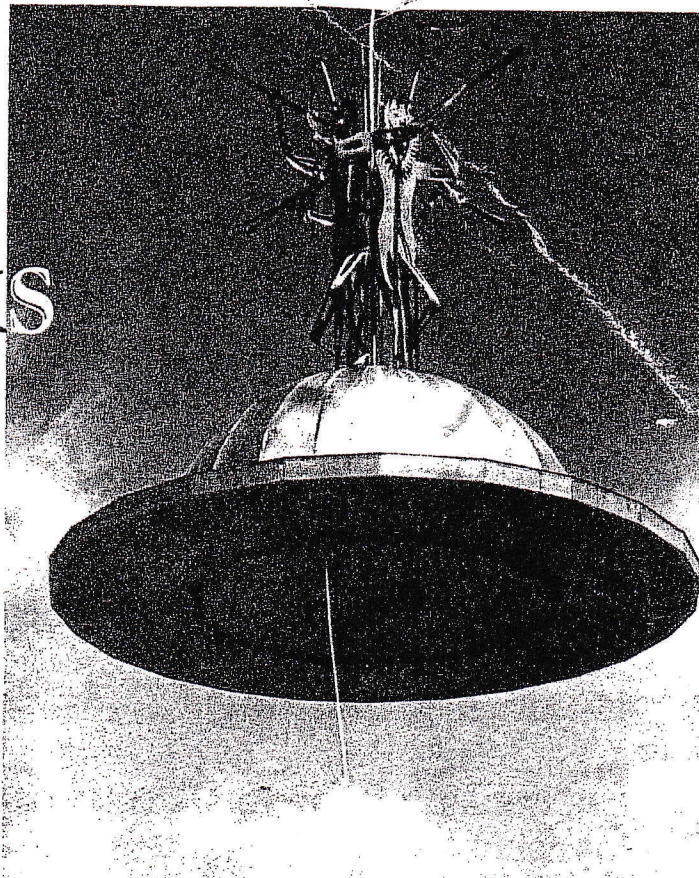
A memorial to DeVere Carlson, a college student and member of the congregation who died last year, the archangels tower 136 feet above the ground. They cap the church's tower, built in memory of Raymond Stehr, a long-time active member of the congregation.

When the plan for the angels was formed, the building contractor turned to Joe Nestrole.

For the last 46 years folks have been turning to the Nestrole family when they want something special done with metal. Joe's father opened the Dallas Iron Works in 1922 and, although it closed for a few years during World War II, Joe is still in business at 3301 Oak Lane in Dallas.

"I guess this is the most unusual thing I've ever done," Joe guessed as he looked at his 48 feet of angels.

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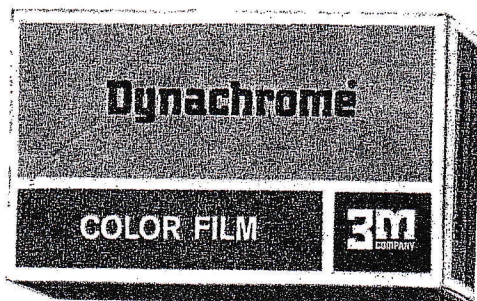


Looking like a prop man in a grade B science fiction thriller, a worker guides angels to their destination atop church tower.

Photos: Craig Wheeler
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The angels are gently deposited atop tower and anchored to withstand high winds.

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CELESTIAL LANDMARKS

(Continued)



The Rev. Frederick Mattil (center) checks progress in the shop with Dallas Iron Worker Joe Nestrole (left) and Vince Ondruse.

from a paper doll

He took a small drawing of the idea, done by Wukasch, bought four 4-by-12-foot sheets of 1/8-inch milled steel and went to work.

First he made paper cutouts of the angel's arms, body, neck, crown, face and horn. Then he traced the forms on the steel and went around the outlines with a cutting torch.

After the parts were cut, Joe and his crew began the task of "cupping," or rounding, the steel to give it strength. That was accomplished with a hammer and a bicep; thousands of "pings" later, the pieces were gently rounded and strong enough to stand high winds.

Each of the angels weighs about 250 pounds and they're anchored to the hood atop the tower by more steel rods, bringing the total weight of the iron works to close to 1,500 pounds.

"Joe tried to say no when we approached him," the Rev. Mattil said. "But I think the challenge finally got to him."

Would Joe Nestrole do it again?

"Yeah," he confirmed. "The next

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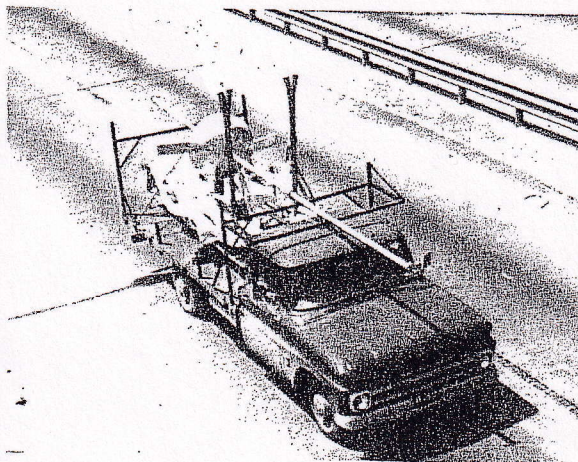
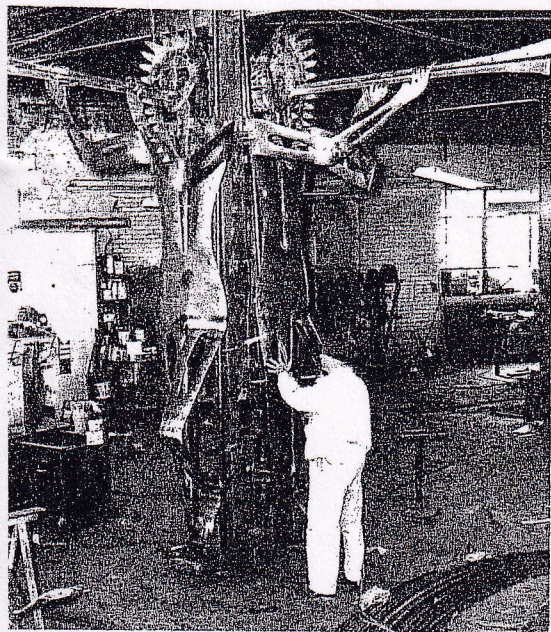


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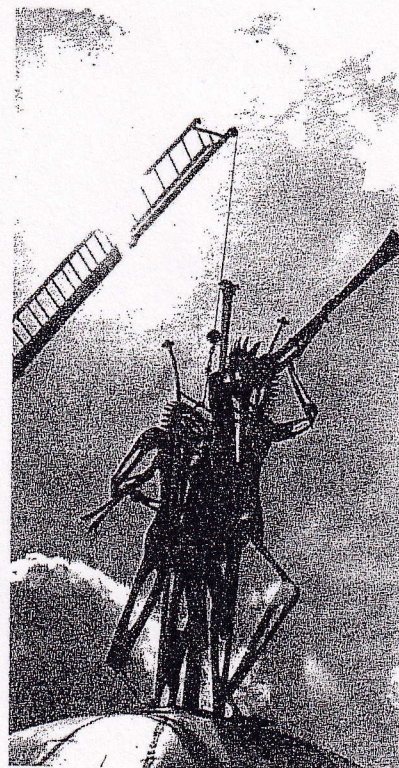
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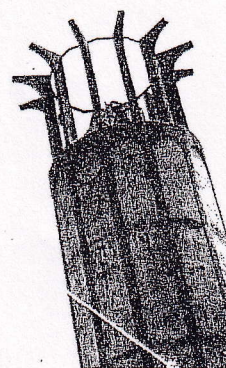
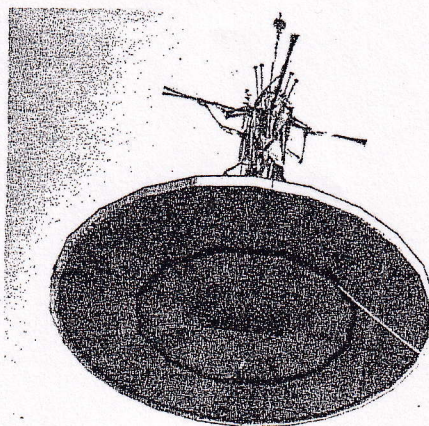
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Long road to angels' new home began in Nestrole's shop (left), followed by trip down North Central Expressway (above), via crane (right) up to tower (below).



Hitching a ride, a workman checks on the base that will support 1,500 pounds of iron archangels.



is the art coming back?

time I'll know what I'm doing. It takes someone that can visualize how it'll look. Figuring out how to do it, how to make it effective—that was a challenge."

Joe and Harvey Brooks, who has worked with him since 1928, have seen the day when their craft was highly popular.

"Before World War II I did work in South America, Hawaii, and Asuncion, Paraguay," Joe recalled. "I did the grill work the governor's mansion in Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands."

A particularly striking sunshade grill made by Joe in 1956 ended up on display in New York's Museum of Modern Art. The architect was so taken by it

that he arranged for the museum to display it for three months.

"The air freight for sending it up there was \$192," Joe said.

Those were the golden days of iron and bronze work, before the mass producers started turning out aluminum and chromed stuff that looks good, but doesn't have the workmanship.

"It takes highly skilled mechanics," Joe Nestrole said about his life's work. "These kids, they don't want to learn it anymore. But this trade is coming back—one of these days you'll see it come back."

You can see one reason why it ought to come back, any time you're driving by the Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Dallas.