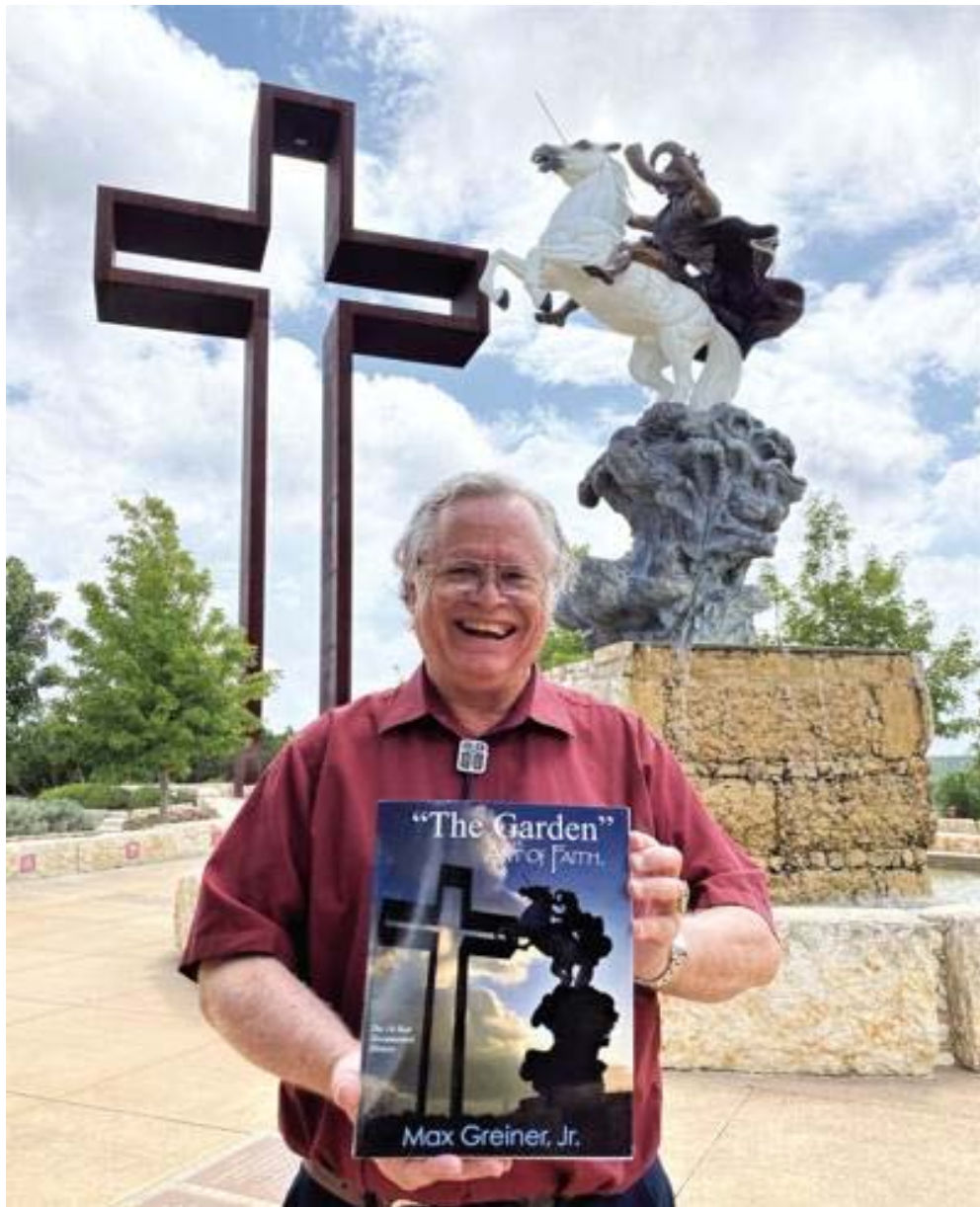


Kerrville Daily Times

December 4, 2020 – FAITH SECTION – Page 11

Greiner's book documents battle for 'The Empty Cross'

By The Coming King Foundation



Max Greiner Jr. holds a copy of his first book, "The Garden – Art Of Faith," at The Coming King Sculpture Prayer Garden. Behind the artist are two of his works: "The Empty Cross," at left, and "The Coming King" at right.

ARTICLE:

The Christian cross has been a lightning rod since Jesus of Nazareth was crucified outside of Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. The religious symbol rouses both love and hate from billions of people around the world to this day. In the USA, the cross has been the target of lawsuits filed by atheists who want to remove the religious symbol from all public property.

On May 5, 2006, passions were aroused in the Lone Star state when a new type of monumental cross sculpture was proposed to be raised over Interstate 10 by professional artist Max Greiner Jr.

Greiner is a Christian evangelist with a 1974 architecture degree from Texas A&M University. The 77-foot-7-inch-tall Cor-ten steel sculpture was proposed to be erected in the approximate center of the USA on IH-10, halfway between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, at the same latitude as Israel. The exact location would be in the Hill Country town of Kerrville.

The multimillion-dollar garden vision and monumental hollow cross design were first publicly revealed when local newspaper reporter Carlina Villalpando did a feature article in The Kerrville Daily Times about the artist's ambitious dream. Greiner optimistically claimed the spiritual art park would be built on faith in God, without debt.

"The Empty Cross," a historically and architecturally unique open cross sculpture, would be the focal point of a 300-foot cross-shaped garden, filled with four monumental Christian bronze sculptures and 77 Bible scriptures in three languages.

The newspaper article immediately generated both praise and vitriol from readers, which resulted in a four-year running battle to prevent the massive cross sculpture from ever being raised in Kerrville. The 23-acre private property was owned by The Coming King Foundation. The land, worth millions of dollars, was located at the main entrance of Kerrville, a small community known at the time for its beautiful hills, crystal clear Guadalupe River and abundant wildlife. Today it is also known around the world for "The Empty Cross" iconic sculpture.

Atheist organizations across America were immediately notified by local critics about the proposed Christian art project. For five years, opposition was voiced to city of Kerrville officials, newspapers, magazines, websites, blogs, social media, radio and on all the San Antonio TV news stations. The belligerent adversaries claimed the proposed contemporary sculpture would ruin the Hill Country and be an eyesore and an insult to millions of non-Christians who traveled the transcontinental highway between California and Florida. An article in the prestigious Austin Texas Observer magazine stated that the very soul of Kerrville was at stake.

Despite constant, vicious criticism, many well-known Christians supported the controversial evangelistic project, including Franklin Graham, Pat Robertson, James Dobson, Paul Crouch and Max Lucado. Governor, Mike Huckabee wrote: “Max Greiner had a vision for a garden filled with sculpture, not to promote art, but to promote Jesus Christ. On the pathway to bringing the vision to fruition, there has not been an obstacle that God has not overcome.”

Years of relentless attacks waged against the proposed art project resulted in hundreds of false charges, threats, vandalism, theft, an IRS audit and a 15-month (\$200,000) lawsuit. The constant public bombardment in the media only increased the fame of “The Empty Cross” and The Coming King Sculpture Prayer Garden, before its existence.

After victory in the lawsuit on March 1, 2010, the massive \$2 million reddish-brown sculpture was finally raised on the 1,930-foot hilltop. On July 27, 2010, local, state, national and international press covered the historic event, which forever changed the skyline of Kerrville.

The finished art park was dedicated on Sept. 13, 2015. It displayed almost a dozen monumental Christian sculptures donated by three professional artists: Beverly Paddleford, David Broussard and Greiner. Greiner also donated his professional architectural services and marketing expertise. In addition, the artist donated his money to make this dream a reality, with the help and agreement of his wife of 42 years, Sherry.

Today, almost 150,000 people a year travel to the small Hill Country town from all 50 states and more than 85 countries to experience The Coming King Sculpture Prayer Garden. The free art garden is open 365 days a year from 7 a.m. until midnight. The once distained vision is now Kerrville’s top tourist attraction both in altitude and attendance.

In October 2020, the free outdoor venue recorded an estimated 22,240 visitors. In November 2020, an estimated 11,643 sojourners climbed the limestone covered hill to experience the unique spiritual park. Garden tourism has been a boon to local merchants struggling to survive the coronavirus pandemic.

“This is the most beautiful place in the United States of America,” said Vilma Ladron De Guevara, a garden visitor from Barranquilla, Colombia. “Every country should have a place like this. It is peaceful here. This is the only country in the world that has a garden like this.”

On Google Reviews, visitor Karen Martha Wetzel wrote, “I have had the good fortune to see many Wonders of the World and The Coming King Sculpture Garden is certainly one of them. God’s messages everywhere have literally saved my life; and to this day,

is a comfort and joy for my heart and soul. Thank you for preserving a piece of God's country."

Jerry Eastman also left a message on Google Reviews. In August 2020, he wrote: "Outstanding place, even if you're not a believer. I have traveled the US and Europe and I've seen nothing like the sculptures, love, devotion and effort put into a FREE attraction. Just standing in the middle of the open cross and looking 77'7" up to the underside is breathtaking. The view of the Kerrville area is also well worth the trip to the cross."

Currently, two new full-size gardens (based on the Kerrville model) are being built now in Minnesota and South Carolina.

The epic 14-year battle for the cross, which Greiner claims involved angels and demons, is documented in his new 490-page, large-format book, called "The Garden – Art Of Faith."

The 3-pound tome features 70 illustrations, historic photos and precise details regarding dozens of supernatural miracles claimed by the artist.

"There is no other book, other than the Bible, that has more miracle testimonies than yours," Jeff Anderson, president of Leadership Inc., said to Greiner about his book.

Greiner's book is available at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Target, Walmart and other book sellers.

Signed copies are only available from the artist at www.thegardenbook.net.