

The Kerrville DAILY TIMES

Max Greiner steps down as president of The Coming King Foundation, reflects on 16-year journey

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During the past two and half years, Max Greiner Jr. has scheduled his alarm to ring at 3:30 a.m., devoting the first three hours of each day to writing his first book, “The Garden — Art of Faith.”

When he typed the final word of the 490-page manuscript in his home studio on Feb. 4, he decided to inform all his friends, conjuring an interesting metaphor to describe his accomplishment.

“I killed the bear,” he wrote in an email.

This book, which will be available to purchase on Amazon in late July, gives an account of the last 16 years of Greiner's life. On May 6, 2004, he and his wife, Sherry, established the nonprofit organization The Coming King Foundation, which currently operates The Coming King Sculpture Prayer Garden on a 1,930-foot hill overlooking Interstate 10.

On July 27, 2010, the foundation erected the garden's centerpiece: a 77-foot-tall steel cross that has become one of Kerrville's signature landmarks. It's the city's most popular tourist destination, attracting 12,686 visitors just in May.

"The Garden — Art of Faith" details the history of the garden and its empty cross, mentioning all the triumphs, setbacks, joys and heartbreaks Greiner experienced during the 16-year period.

The book also coincides with Greiner's decision to step down as president of the foundation to become chairman of the board.

At a recent meeting, the foundation's 21 trustees unanimously elected Weldon Baker to succeed Greiner as president.

Greiner insists he isn't retiring. He's simply entrusting Baker to handle the daily responsibilities of managing the garden so he can focus more on writing and art.

"A lot of people have asked me, 'How can you let go of something you and your wife birthed after all these years?'" Greiner said. "The truth is that I knew it was God's moment, and it was time. We built this thing to continue past us. If you don't trust people to take over, it dies with you. I wanted to trust all the good people God has put in my life, and God picked out Weldon Baker to take over the day-to-day operation, administration and management. I don't have to worry about all the little details."

"He's not retiring," Baker added with a smirk. "He's just a little tired."

Greiner has always been passionate about his faith, praying every morning since he became a Christian at age 7. He's also a talented artist, graduating from Texas A&M in 1974 with a degree in Architectural Design. In 2001, he felt compelled to use his gift to glorify God.

In December of that year, he and Sherry attended a speech from pastor Mahesh Chavda in Austin. According to Greiner, Chavda addressed he and his wife halfway through the sermon, telling the audience that Greiner's art would be involved in the restoration of the tabernacle.

Greiner originally dismissed Chavda's words. But, in 2002, Greiner said he received an email from a stranger who stated that God was calling the artist to create a 77-foot cross over Interstate 10. Greiner thought the stranger was crazy, but he still prayed about the email.

That's when he said he began experiencing the visions.

He saw a cross-shaped garden, he saw the scriptures etched in stone in the gardens, and he saw people lining up to visit the cross.

"Everything in that original vision has taken place," Greiner said.

He found people willing to help bring these visions to fruition.

In 2005, Herschel Reid gave The Coming King Foundation \$500,000 to purchase 23 acres of land next to the highway.

Greiner, though, also faced plenty of opposition. Not everyone was a fan of the empty cross.

In 2008, the residents of the Mesa Vista subdivision filed a lawsuit against The Coming King Foundation, claiming the cross would violate deed restrictions of the land. The two parties eventually settled out of court in 2010.

Some people submitted letters to the editor complaining that the cross was an obnoxious encroachment of people's religious freedoms; others dismissed the undertaking as a marketing endeavor to promote Greiner's religious art.

"A lot of critics said (my wife and I) were doing this for money," Greiner said. "We are the biggest donors. We are still the biggest donors. We donated mostly art, mostly money. It was never about money for us; it was about bringing glory to God."

Neither the lawsuit nor the criticism deterred Greiner from accomplishing his mission. He wanted to build a sculpture that connected all types of people to Christ. He believes the empty cross has accomplished that goal.

"There is a peace up here," Greiner added. "Even for those who aren't believers."

He said at least 30 people have canceled suicides after visiting the cross. Policemen, firefighters and nurses often travel to the cross before they begin their long shifts. Others visit simply to meditate and reflect during stressful situations.

“Especially in today’s world and with COVID-19, people come up here for shelter to get away from the outside world,” Baker added. “They can clear their minds in God’s garden.”

Greiner believes the garden will continue to give people peace under Baker’s leadership — and for many years to come. He’s hoping to write more books about the garden’s impact on Kerrville.

“It’s going to be here forever,” Greiner said. “It’s going to bless Kerrville forever.”

