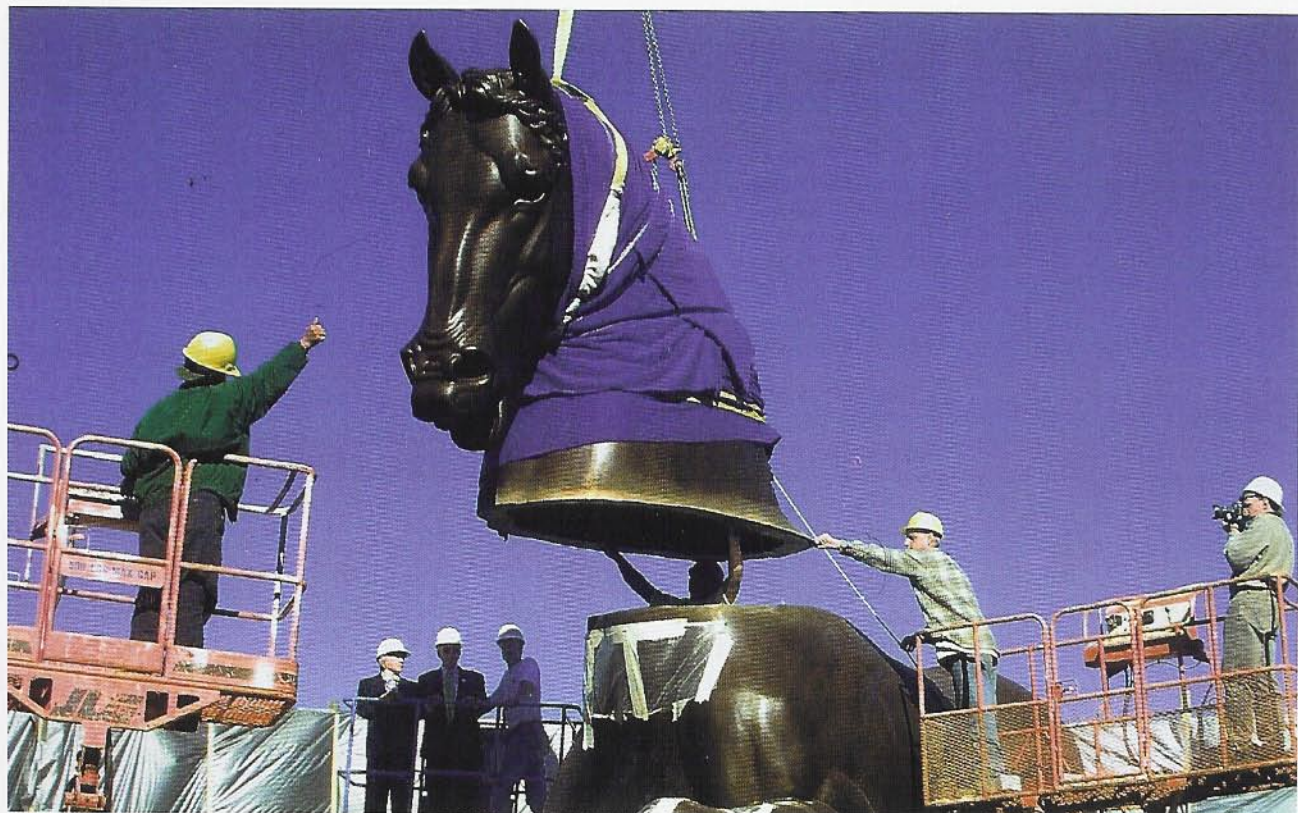


The American Horse

In 1996, Meijer's son Hank, a partner in his business endeavors, read an article in the *New York Times* about the Leonardo da Vinci horse project and its financial problems. The project began when Charles Dent, an airline pilot and amateur artist, learned about da Vinci's unfinished commission, *Il Cavallo*, in *National Geographic* magazine.

The younger Meijer encouraged his father to get involved, and a Meijer group traveled to the studio of Nina Akamu, who had been brought into the project to correct the flaws of the eight-foot Dent model. It would prove not fixable. Technically, the sculpture was inaccurate — bones were the wrong length, muscles had been sculpted where they didn't exist. "It just didn't have the flair or fire it should have," said Neil Estern, a sculptor at the Tallix Foundry in Beacon, N.Y., where the horse was cast.

Ultimately the committee came to recognize the need to discard the Dent model and begin a new one. "The committee gave me the permission, brave on their part, to do it entirely again," says Akamu. "Luckily, Fred had faith in me. Who would ever say, 'We know you can do this 24-foot sculpture'? How would they know? How would I know? I had never even done an eight-foot



Craftsmen from the Tallix Art Foundry in Beacon, N.Y., pour molten bronze into sand molds of sections of the 24-foot *American Horse*, which arrived in Grand Rapids, Mich., in seven pieces. A crane lifted and placed each piece. Workers then bolted and welded the pieces into place.

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