Although the mom was a bit embarrassed, I was thrilled that the art had opened up a world of imagination and engagement. And this certainly taught me to look at things differently. We need more conversations like this on the streets of Greensboro.

And that’s why The Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro created the Public Art Endowment in 2008. Like Levy, the foundation believes that art is closely tied to a city’s identity and its people. Through the generous contributions of endowment trustees, such as Levy and her husband Richard, new and significant pieces of art are installed in public places, breathing fresh life into Greensboro’s streets and parks.

The Public Art Endowment is a new model for public art programs nationally — one funded solely through private support and overseen by noted art professionals. “The endowment is a very positive thing. I wish we had them in every city,” said the late internationally renowned sculptor Dennis Oppenheim. Just months before he died in January, Oppenheim unveiled his Entrance to a Garden in Greensboro to great fanfare. “It’s got a very interesting role here,” he said of the endowment. “It’s unique. I’ve never come across anything quite like it. Anything that helps art operate in the public has got to be applauded, so I’m very grateful that they could make this happen.”

Each year, a selection committee of art experts and professionals vets pieces and appropriate prospective sites to put before trustees for a vote. The winning piece is then brought to Greensboro.

I’ve always been interested in art and have spent time educating myself by visiting museums, reading, and talking to artists and collectors,” says Adair Phifer Armfield, an endowment trustee. “However, I really know nothing about public art and am excited to have the opportunity to learn more about it and be part of a process in Greensboro that allows all the citizens to enjoy public art.”

By design, endowment participation is quite accessible. While full trustee membership is possible with gifts of $25,000 or more, others can participate in “trustee groups” for as little as $80 a month over five years. “Wealthy residents aren’t the only ones who appreciate art,” says Adeline Talbot, program director. “It was important to us that we shape a program that many, many people can join.”

For more information on The Public Art Endowment, visit cfgg.org.