

# The Oakland Tribune

January 14, 2009

## Unity, rebirth, the theme of new public art in West Oakland

By Cecily Burt

The colorful, mixed-income apartment complexes by Bridge Housing that straddle Mandela Parkway in West Oakland have been home to residents for a while, and the ground-floor storefronts on Seventh Street are slowly filling.

And quietly, amid the turmoil last week caused by the BART shooting, the development's finishing touches — two sculptures commissioned by the city of Oakland — were installed in plazas on opposite corners.

The eye-catching sculptures called "Unity" were created by artist Robert Ellison, of Sonoma County. The painted steel pieces honor former South African president Nelson Mandela, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

The sculptures represent two seed pods beginning to sprout and grow toward each other, symbolizing the renaissance of West Oakland.



The tall, wedge-shaped bases on which the pods sit are inscribed with passages from Mandela's speeches chosen by community members during a 2004 workshop with the artist.

Ellison completed the sculptures more than three years ago, but installation of the pieces was delayed until Caltrans completed work on new sidewalks and other infrastructure improvements at the end of Mandela Parkway at Seventh Street. The work was finished late last year.