

Putting Brown in bronze

By Michael Morton/Daily News staff
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HOPKINTON -

Until recently, sculptor Michael Alfano spent long sessions in the garage of his School Street home creating a life-size tribute to the man who brought the Boston Marathon to town.

Then, when he needed to clear his head, he hit the road to train for the 112th running of one of the sport's premier events.

"Doing a sculpture is truly like doing a marathon," he said. "You just have to keep slowly at it. You can't run the 26 miles without putting one foot in front of the other."

Alfano's journey began roughly three years ago, when the Hopkinton Athletic Association approached him about sculpting a monument to commemorate the town's legacy as the marathon's starting point. By the time he received the official commission last fall, he had qualified for and run in his first Boston Marathon, with plans to compete in the upcoming 2008 race.

While Alfano initially envisioned a generic male figure holding a starter's pistol, research revealed a more compelling figure from the marathon's history: George Brown, a Hopkinton resident who moved the race's starting line from Ashland to his hometown in 1924 as a member of the governing Boston Athletic Association.

Brown also served as the manager of American track and field teams at five Olympics, ran the Boston Garden for several years and was inducted into the American and Canadian hockey halls of fame for his contributions to the sport.

"It just became a natural fit," Alfano said. "We realized how influential he was in the world of sports."

Sculpted in clay, Alfano's model of Brown was sent earlier this month to a Chelsea foundry to be cast in bronze. It depicts the Hopkinton sportsman in a fedora and trenchcoat, with a starter's pistol poised over his head. Brown kicked off the race for 33 years, a tradition that remained in his family and which one of his grandsons, Walter Brown, currently carries on.

"It's so nice to see him remembered by the folks in Hopkinton," said Tom Burke, another grandson who grew up in town and now lives in West Roxbury. "We were just astounded as to what a great job Michael (Alfano) did with it. "We're all very excited."

Alfano hopes to get the finished sculpture a few weeks before the April 21 marathon. It is scheduled to be unveiled at a concert April 13, then placed on the Town Common for the race until a permanent home can be found.

During his research for the project, Alfano said he became fascinated with the marathon's history and now can't wait for his creation to become a part of the legacy.

"It just sort of gets under your skin and takes over your life," he said of the marathon's mystique. "It's going to be amazing running past my sculpture."

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Photo by Photo by Kathleen Culler

Guy L. Morse III, executive director of the Boston Athletic Association, looks at a sculpture of Hopkinton's George V. Brown, who is credited with bringing the start of the Boston Marathon to Hopkinton.