

Welcome to Spring in 401

Big Bugs Invade Rhode Island



David Rogers' Exhibit Takes Over the Green Animals Topiary Garden in Portsmouth

Born on Long Island, David Rogers learned to weld at the age of 13. By 15, he experimented with forest materials using dried branches and rope-lashing techniques to assemble various abstract structures. At this early stage, he had already steel-welded his first two insects—a dragonfly and a housefly.

He later apprenticed with a builder/restorer of wooden sailboats and cabinetry; worked as a house carpenter on historic Victorian age homes; did stints as a cab driver; was a magician's assistant; an actor, in Shakespeare summer stock; and also a sailboat delivery crew member on the eastern seaboard.

With a devotion to a rustic form of design, using all-natural materials, he began constructing various styles of furnishings and garden structures employing multiple types of limbs and techniques. He developed a very ornate bent-sapling construction style called "Victorian Rustic."



In the fall of 1990, while on a cousin's farm in Vermont's Green Mountains, he encountered a maple sapling bent over from previous winter's ice storm. As he explains on his website: "There was something about the curvature and posture of this particularly ravaged tree—a backbone to a giant beast, perhaps that suggested a new life for the tree. Using dried branches and different varieties of saplings, a 'dinosaur' sculpture emerged in 12 inspired days."

He first conceived the idea of the David Rogers' Big Bugs exhibition in 1991. He built 10 sculptures and had his first show at the Dallas Arboretum in the summer of 1994.

This month, Rogers will present his exhibit at the Green Animals Topiary Garden, which opened on Friday, June 25, and runs through Sunday, October 3. The amazing pollinators and other huge bugs include a 10 foot Daddy Long Legs, weighing in at 600 pounds; an 18 foot Praying Mantis at 1,200 pounds; and a 10 foot Damselfly; along with an array of other massive creatures—nine total—placed in various locations around Green Animals. There will also be a colossal butterfly with a 5 foot wingspan in The Breakers Welcome Center in Newport.

The sculptures are created with various combinations of found or fallen trees, cut green saplings selectively harvested from the willow family, dry branches, and other sustainable forest materials. The work is a combination of landscape, recycled, and environmental art.

"When I go out into the forest, I am looking for shapes, colors, and textures," David says of his process. "The inherent uniqueness of these materials, their different shapes, colors, and textures, provide these sculptures with character, definition, and a sense of motion."



“We have never hosted anything like this before, but Green Animals is the perfect setting for this unique exhibition,” said Trudy Coxe, CEO and Executive Director of The Preservation Society of Newport County, which owns the topiary garden. “People are going to be amazed when they see what David has created. The size and detail are just stunning. We cannot wait to share this with our visitors.”

For more information or to reserve tickets visit, NewportMansions.org.

Admission to the Dave Rogers’ Big Bugs exhibition is included with the Preservation Society’s Stroll the Gardens & Ground ticket, which also includes two other properties and allows picnicking on the grounds.

Located in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, Green Animals Topiary Garden is the oldest and most northern topiary garden in the United States and home to more than 80 topiaries in the shape of animals and geometric designs.