

Jill Bolte Taylor wants Bloomington to display artistic big brains: www.heraldtimesonline.com

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Jill Bolte Taylor wants to bring big brains to Bloomington.

That's 5 feet by 5 feet by 4 feet. Colorful. About 12 of them downtown, and maybe six more on the Indiana University campus.

It's all part of her idea for a Jill Bolte Taylor Institute, the next wave in the ever-changing life of the brain scientist, author, motivational speaker and likely future movie subject.

As she joked to the Bloomington Rotary Club Tuesday: Who knew a stroke could be so good for you?

The blending of her debilitating stroke in 1996 and her career as someone who studies the brain has propelled the Bloomington resident to multiple appearances on Oprah Winfrey's TV show and a book that's been translated into 30 languages. "My Stroke of Insight" explains her experience 15 years ago when, as a neuroanatomist at Harvard, she experienced a severe hemorrhage in the left hemisphere of her brain. She could not walk, talk, read, write, or recall any of her life, and it took her eight years to recover all of her functions and thinking ability. The past seven years, she's been sharing her story and building a powerful following.

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Now, she's asking herself, "What are you doing with your power?"

Her newest idea for her power is the institute, which would provide education, awareness, appreciation, prevention, mental health and recovery information related to the brain; be a place for her and members of the public to donate money and energy; and be the starting point for a community art project.

That's where the big brains come in.

She's calling the project The Brain Extravaganza. She envisions public art displays of 5-foot-tall brains at a dozen locations downtown, possibly along the B-Line. "Now you know what the B stands for," she cracked.

She said she's been talking to city officials about her idea since January. She also has been working the same amount of time with artist Joe LaMantia, who has been involved with many high-profile public art projects over the years.

Miah Michaelsen, the city's assistant economic development director for the arts, said to date her office has been acting as a resource, gathering information about various "On Parade" art projects such as Cows on Parade in Chicago and Dolphins on Parade in Atlanta. She's found a lot of information to turn over, but one thing she hasn't found.

"In all our research, we have not found any actual organs on parade," Michaelsen said.

Bolte Taylor has a timeline for the project that would start with prototypes this summer, a call for artists this fall, the "distribution of brains" in January or February, and the installation of the display in May for the summer of 2012. She also sees potential for a gala auction of the brain art, possibly tied with the premiere of the movie about her life. She said the movie, to be directed by Ron Howard and featuring Jodie Foster as Bolte Taylor, is on track for late 2012, but she knows events could delay the timing or derail the project.

Still, she said, she'd like to move forward with the project whether it coincides with a movie premiere or not — mainly because it would be fun.

Michaelsen said a formal proposal to the Bloomington Board of Public Works would have to be approved before the art display could be installed on public property.

Jill Bolte Taylor. File photo



