

## Laumeier Sculpture Park

12580 Rott Road

St. Louis, MO 63127

(314) 615-5278

<http://www.laumeier.org>

### **Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)**

Overall Rating: 4 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 1.5 stars
- Availability of docent-led tours: 5 stars
- On-site docents and staff: 1 star
- Ease of visibility of featured attractions: 5 stars
- Tactile and auditory components: 5 stars (under continued development)

This evaluation was last updated on July 2, 2012 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Ms. Dana Turkovic, Curator of Exhibitions at Laumeier Sculpture Park, and Ms. Clara Collins Coleman, Laumeier's Curator of Interpretation.

Laumeier Sculpture Park is a perfect place to visit for anyone interested in three-dimensional art and the great outdoors. While traveling the many walking paths at Laumeier, visitors will encounter many massive artistic creations and sculptures, set amidst an aesthetically pleasing natural environment. The park itself presents a significant amount of navigational challenges which necessitate sighted assistance for blind and visually impaired individuals. However, the park's well-developed docent-led tours and the park's increasing utilization of maquettes and other tactile components provide new and fascinating ways of exploring three-dimensional art.

Although Metro used to have a bus stop on Rott Road, just outside the main entrance to Laumeier Park, this is one of many stops that have been cut from Metro's routes over the past few years. The Rott Road stop is hoped to be restored as more funding is made available to Metro in the upcoming years. Currently, the closest stop is on Lindbergh, just under a half a mile away. As this route involves cutting through parking lots, it is not the most ideal of routes, but for a blind individual with highly-developed mobility skills, this route may be navigable if that individual is provided with adequate directions on getting from the stop to Laumeier. Please note, the individual will need to carefully judge if he or she can successfully navigate such a

route. For a less stressful commute, local cab services, Metro's Call-A-Ride service, and other sighted drivers remain the best means by which to access Laumeier Sculpture Park.

One's initial arrival at the park presents the second major navigational difficulty. A modest sign currently identifies the main entrance for sighted individuals, but the path may not be immediately obvious to blind or visually impaired visitors, and, with the exception of two six-foot informational and directional panels, the park's overall signage is poor, even from the perspective of sighted individuals. There is neither a help desk nor a greeter near the entrance, making it very difficult to solicit assistance. However, during in-door museum hours, a museum associate may be found at the main desk in the museum's shop to help answer questions. Most of the paths through the park, though well-kept, are numerous and winding. These factors increase the difficulty with which blind and visually impaired travelers may maintain a clear sense of orientation within the park's spacious grounds. Having a sighted guide to assist in exploring Laumeier Sculpture Park is considered mandatory from this author's point of view when visiting this particular facility.

For visitor convenience, Laumeier Sculpture Park offers individual and group docent-led tours upon request. This is extremely advantageous for both sighted and non-sighted visitors, for the docents offer a wealth of insightful information about the meaning and composition of the various works of art. When giving tours to sight-impaired individuals, docents are careful to incorporate additional verbal descriptions of the sculptures and to showcase the park's growing collection of tactile representations of the various works of art. From May through October, complimentary 2:00 tours are given every first and third Sunday of the month. Additional individual and group tours can be arranged two weeks in advance, costing only \$2.00 per person and \$25.00 for groups of 25 or fewer. The St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired, as well as the Missouri School for the Blind, both make regular visits to the park. For information on the next visit by the St. Louis Society for the Blind, please contact Ms. Gloria Tendeck by calling (314) 968-9000.

After ensuring sighted assistance in navigating around Laumeier Sculpture Park, blind and visually impaired visitors will be able to take full advantage of the park's growing collection of maquettes. These are miniature bronze replicas of featured works of art. The replicas are placed on a concrete pedestal along with both Braille and print name plates that relay interesting information about the size and meaning of the sculpture, as well as the name of the artist responsible for its creation. In November 2010, Laumeier Sculpture Park revived new enthusiasm in the maquette project, unveiling five new bronze miniatures and a tactile map of the grounds. In partnership with the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, the park plans to continue to expand its growing collection of tactile replicas, to repair and improve the older existing maquettes, and to address larger way-finding initiatives to aid both sighted and non-sighted visitors to Laumeier Sculpture Park. The next batch of miniature maquettes is due to be installed during the summer of 2012. This evolving collection has received much positive acclaim from the blind and visually impaired of the area, placing three-dimensional art literally at a person's fingertips. The descriptions on the Braille and large-print name plates also prove indispensable in grasping the artist's interpretation of his or her work. Furthermore, being able to walk directly up to the original work of art completes the experience by placing the size comparison between the original masterpiece and the tactile miniature into proper perspective.

The park also offers audio tours, available to all visitors. These tours are very informative about the meaning and history of the individual sculptures, but some lack a basic visual description which would be extremely beneficial to blind visitors, especially when dealing with sculptures that currently do not have an accompanying maquette. In addition, the devices themselves are not very accessible to blind or visually impaired individuals, for the iPods operate via a touch screen, so sighted assistance will once again be necessary for a blind or visually impaired individual to gain a full and meaningful experience. Laumeier Sculpture Park staff are currently in the process of re-evaluating, re-writing, and re-recording the audio tour script in order to provide cues and descriptions that will make the tour more accessible and meaningful for sight-impaired patrons. More information on new enhancements and accommodations will be provided as plans progress.

Before visiting, interested individuals will wish to check out Laumeier Sculpture Park's website. Although low vision computer users will experience minimal difficulty in navigating the web pages, the site does pose a significant obstacle to totally blind computer users. Nearly all of the site's key links are activated through graphic pop-up menus and are not accessible through screen reading software such as Jaws for Windows. Laumeier Sculpture Park is aware of this technological barrier and plans to address the issue in the near future. In the meantime, those requiring further information to plan a visit to Laumeier Sculpture Park would be well advised to solicit sighted assistance or to call the main telephone number for the park, listed at the beginning of this entry.

For these and any other questions, please contact one of the following park personnel.

Ms. Dana Turkovic, Curator of Exhibitions

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