

Metro Business

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Inside
Business



Corporate ladder leads to trouble

What is art?

Compared with business interests, not much. The Principal Financial Group of Des Moines, reacting to tenants' complaints at a building it owns in Columbia, Md., has decided to remove a controversial sculpture from the building's lobby.

The sculpture is 19½ feet tall and is called "Corporate Ladder." At the top is a white man who appears to be casually kicking the face of one of four people struggling up the ladder. The climbers include a woman and a black man.

Some tenants in the Lakeview II office building considered the sculpture offensive. "To my knowledge, there are two tenants who really don't like it. . . . However, the two who don't like it have been quite vocal," said Walter Walsh, vice president, corporate relations.

"It's a reasonably valuable piece of art," he said, although he couldn't put a dollar value on it.

"Corporate Ladder," Walsh said, is the work of New York sculptor Ed Massey and was commissioned after a 54-inch-high version was displayed at the Bowers Museum in Orange County, Calif. He said The Principal's goals were to "present an interesting environment" at its Maryland building that also adds value to its investment.

The sculpture succeeded in creating an interesting environment, but, with some tenants squawking, it was questionable whether it had added value to the building.

So what's Principal going to do with it?

"It's our intention to remove it," said Walsh.

And then? "We're probably going to bring it to Des Moines," he said, although "we just don't know what we're going to do with it."