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Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas  
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## More cities leaving mark on manhole covers

08:42 PM CST on Wednesday, March 9, 2005

**By TONY HARTZEL / The Dallas Morning News**

They've been run over, stepped on and generally taken for granted.

Finally, after decades of obscurity, the lowly manhole cover is getting a much-needed makeover.

From Fort Worth to Celina, cities and developers have started forging their civic identities onto the 180-pound, 24-inch-diameter iron canvases. Longhorns, steam trains and city logos now adorn the portals to the underside of many developments.

"When I first saw it, I thought it was attractive and different," said George Snowden, assistant field operations supervisor for the Fort Worth Streets Department, who noticed the new manhole covers last year after they were installed by developers.

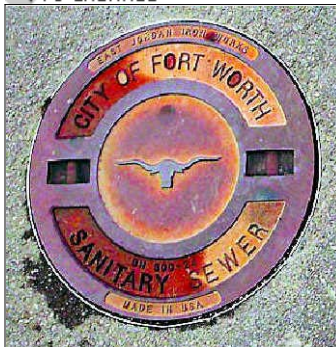
Several developments in west Fort Worth now have the new lids, which feature the city name and its longhorn emblem. The personalization trend, which can be traced to the late 1990s, has started taking hold not only in cities of almost 600,000 people like Fort Worth, but in small towns of 3,100 like Celina in northern Collin County.

Celina recently approved the first installation of personalized manhole covers, which sit in a subdivision still under construction. Some of the city's newest residents now are able see Celina's logo, complete with wheat stalks and the city name.

"We just wanted to personalize everything in the city," said Kenny Faulkner, Celina's public works superintendent, who added that the city recently added its logo to a water tower. "It doesn't cost anything extra to have this done, so we figured 'Why not?'"

One of the area's major suppliers, Bass & Hays Foundry in Grand

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Photos by VERNON BRYANT/DMN

**Fort Worth is among the cities personalizing their manhole covers, emblazoning them with its longhorn emblem.**

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Prairie, started offering the vanity manhole cover option around 1998. It began replacing the traditional manhole cover pattern of concentric circles, which likely developed decades ago to provide traction for tires driving over the iron plates.



Photos by VERNON BRYANT/DMN

For its large customers, Bass & Hays absorbs the \$3,000 cost to transfer a computerized design onto a special aluminum pattern used in the forging process, said sales manager Paul Mayfield.

One of the most elaborate so far, Mr. Mayfield said, was a cover with a steam train designed to commemorate Irving's centennial celebration a few years ago. The covers now grace some streets in the city's Heritage District.

**Plano, Irving and Fort Worth have discovered the canvas of iron. For its large customers, a Grand Prairie foundry absorbs the \$3,000 cost to forge the designs.**

So, any response so far?

"Not really," said David Cardenas, Irving's assistant to the city manager. "The council thought it was a pretty good idea. I don't know if people are looking down enough in the Historic

District."

Nationwide, urban residents also view manhole covers as blank slates for public art. In some areas of the country, contests have been held to pick elaborate designs to grace the lids. In Vail, Colo., the city has started selling its own manhole covers to tourists and others looking for mementos of the ski resort town.

Back in North Texas, cities from Plano to Arlington to Irving have come up with their own designs. Plano has had its name on manhole covers for as long as 20 years, and developers likely absorbed the cost initially, said City Engineer Alan Upchurch.

"The idea was to distinguish Plano and set ourselves apart as something a little different," he said.

Private developers have gotten into the act, as well. Near downtown Dallas, Hillwood Capital commissioned the creation of about 50 lids with the "V" logo for the Victory development at American Airlines Center.

"The manhole covers not only serve an obvious and purely practical purpose, but they also subtly reinforce the Victory brand, help to establish a sense of place and better define the district for visitors," said Jonas Woods, president of Hillwood Capital.

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