

## Sunday Spotlight: Unconventional artist gives 1,500 a lucky-dollar day

By Chris Quintana

The New Mexican | Sunday, October 19, 2014

Matthew Chase-Daniel thought the hard part of distributing 1,500 one-dollar bills across town would be raising the money. But dropping, crumbling or throwing 40 to 50 bills around town every day proved the more laborious task.

“I hadn’t really thought about it in the beginning,” he said. “It turned out to be a huge amount of work.”

Chase-Daniel’s project, Dollar Distribution, took place between Aug. 22 and Sept. 14. For a month, he planted dollar bills at street corners, on sidewalks, in library books or in pockets of shirts in thrift stores. And he picked up national attention along the way. The local artist was recently featured on Money.com, a subsidiary of Time Inc.

Chase-Daniel hails from the East Coast but has lived in Santa Fe for 25 years. He said he and his wife came to the city in 1989 to be with his wife’s ailing mother and never left.

To make a living, Chase-Daniel restored houses around town and eventually became a landlord.

He’s a tall man with thick hands, and it’s not hard to imagine him wielding a hammer.

These days, he helps manage a mobile art gallery called Axle Contemporary that is housed in a silver van shaped something like a mail truck.

He and his wife have a son who attended high schools across town and a boarding school for the arts in Southern California before dropping out at 17 to chase his dream of working in the film industry. Now, 19, he lives in California, where Chase-Daniel renovated a storage room into a livable space for him.



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Local artist Matthew Chase-Daniel is shown Wednesday in the Santa Fe Railyard with the roving art gallery Axle Contemporary, which he manages. Chase-Daniels recently received national attention for his crowdfunded project, Dollar Distribution, in which he collected \$1,500 and then hid the 1,500 one-dollar bills all around the city for others to find. Jane Phillips/The New Mexican



Local artist Matthew Chase-Daniel shows how he distributed dollars around Santa Fe. Jane Phillips/The New Mexican

Speaking of his son's decision to drop out, Chase-Daniel said, "It was scary. You're taking a risk. But it can lead to a much happier life."

The idea for the Dollar Distribution project came to Chase-Daniel while he was driving through Santa Fe and spotted an errant \$1 note blowing across the road. He watched as other motorists braked and swerved. He assumed they were entranced by the currency, and he wanted to create a similar response via the Dollar Distribution project.

To make the project a reality, he turned to Kickstarter, a crowdfunding site. He offered rewards to those who donated, but they were mostly intangible. For example, he told those who donated the minimum amount that he would take their money, smile and give it away, although those who gave \$150 would receive a photocopy of a picture of one of the locations where he had stashed a dollar bill.



His fundraising efforts weren't limited to the electronic realm. People on the street would hand him pocketfuls of change and worn bills. He eventually raised \$1,500, electronically and in cash in different denominations, and then went to the bank to get 1,500 one-dollar bills. He said the money was the size of a large brick.

Before he started the distribution, Chase-Daniel put the money inside the mobile art gallery he runs with Jerry Wellman so people could have a look at it. He installed a glass barrier, however, to prevent onlookers from being tempted to snag one of the bills.

In August Chase-Daniel set about in August distributing the bills. Sometimes he would drop the cash while walking through town. Or he would tuck the currency into a nook or cranny where it wouldn't immediately be noticed. He would also drive through neighborhoods, crunching the dollar bills and tossing them into driveways. He hid dollars in library books at the Oliver La Farge Branch Library and even on flower blossoms.

Because he wanted to replicate his chance experience of encountering a dollar bill, Chase-Daniel strove to drop the bills anonymously. That meant he didn't often get a chance to observe people's reactions when they discovered the currency.

“What I wanted most for the project was for people to find a dollar and be like, ‘Oh, it's my lucky day, there's a dollar,’ ” he said. “That was it. I just wanted that very simple experience of finding a dollar on the street.”

He did share one instance when he was able to watch people's responses. It was during the Indian Market weekend, when tourists and locals flooded downtown Santa Fe and the Railyard, where the new Indigenous Fine Art Market was held. He would place a bill a few feet away from his perch at the Railyard and read a book as he waited for someone to find it.

He said most people had the same response: They'd see the bill, pick it up and then swivel their heads to see if anyone had obviously lost it. Then, not finding an owner, they would tuck the dollar into a pocket or wallet and walk away.

The distribution took a month. Chase-Daniel would sometimes document where he left the bills with photos, and on one occasion, a photographer shadowed him while he worked. He assembled the resulting pictures into a book, which will be for sale soon.

Chase-Daniel's Dollar Distribution is only his latest unconventional art project. In addition to the rotating art gallery in the back of the Axle Contemporary van, he and Wellman dreamed up an interactive exhibit in Taos with potatoes. They invited people to create stamps out of potatoes and then used chile, turmeric and similar brightly colored food stuffs as ink. They put the prints on the walls, and then cut up the potatoes and threw them into a stew.

Though the Dollar Distribution project received national attention, Chase-Daniel is unlikely to replicate it anytime soon. It was fun, he said, but it would just be more of the same if he did it again. And he can get bored. He was once a jeweler who loved the process of imagining and creating a new work but was disinterested in making the same piece over and over again.

"I got really bored," he said. "I couldn't bring myself to get up in the morning to do it anymore. So I stopped."

*Contact Chris Quintana at 986-3093 or [cquintana@sfnewmexican.com](mailto:cquintana@sfnewmexican.com). Follow him on Twitter @CQuintanaSF.*