

Creating community through public art

By *Franco Latona*

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[1]A new mural debuted at the Salvation Army in Darbo-Worthington. A collaboration between Sustain Dane and Sharon Kilfoy of the Williamson Street Arts Center, the project sought to build connections between neighbors (Franco Latona/Madison Commons).

Community members in the Darbo-Worthington Neighborhood celebrated the completion of a public mural Friday evening at the Salvation Army where the painting now hangs on the east wall.

Sustain Dane coordinated the project in partnership with Sharon Kilfoy, director of the Williamson Street Arts Center. It began in March of 2014 with community input sessions where local residents described their visions for a healthy, vibrant neighborhood.

Some of the topics mentioned were "...safe and clean streets, well used parks, outdoor activities, more green space, low unemployment, a local grocery store, community gardens and orchards where people resolve conflicts nonviolently," Lauren Beriont, director of Sustainable Neighborhood Initiative at Sustain Dane, told the crowd gathered outside the Salvation Army. Beriont facilitated the community conversations, and

managed the project throughout. This was the first time Sustain Dane partnered with Kilfoy on a public mural; a second project is underway in Madison's South Side.

Kilfoy, who served as the “conductor” of the mural project, along with a team of local artists, helped community members translate their visions into a piece of art.

She told the crowd that residents kept mentioning the importance of Worthington Park in their neighborhood, and one child in particular called it an “enchanted forest.”

“And we thought, that's it!” Kilfoy told the crowd. “Worthington Park as an enchanted forest. So that's what we've tried to give you here.”

The mural represents a number of features from the neighborhood. It depicts two people playing basketball, the bridge near the Salvation Army, and the local community gardens. The mural also has abstract qualities, as is evident from the faces on the trees, or the swirling blue background that leads to a shining white light.

“It's kind of a dream. It's a fantasy,” said Sirena Flores, Kilfoy’s granddaughter and a senior at East High School. Flores helped paint the mural, and in particular the people and realistic aspects of it, which she said are her strengths as an artist.

Nicole Wetzal, a local resident and member of Women of Worthington, a grassroots community group, contributed to the project from the start. She said that the words Darbo-Worthington often raises “red flags” in the minds of Madison residents, but that projects like this help emphasize its positive aspects.

“I do think something like this can be an awakening to identity,” Wetzal said. “I think it kind of anchors us.”

“There's several organizations in the neighborhood that are working hard to make this home for us. And those of us who live here want to make it home, so we keep investing and keep working,” she said.

Public art program planned for South Madison

By Franco Latona

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[1]A

Saturday meeting will seek community input for a public art program organized by Dane Arts Mural Arts and Sustain Dane (Courtesy photo).

South side residents will have the chance to collaboratively paint two murals this spring and summer as part of a neighborhood project hosted by Dane Arts Mural Arts in partnership with Sustain Dane's program smART (Sustainability + Madison + Art).

The murals will be painted on the walls of the Dane County Transportation Building and the Zion City International Church Ministries building. All residents are invited to the Zion City Community Outreach Center on April 11, from 4-7 pm, to share their ideas about positive aspects of their neighborhood.

"People will be sharing what they love and are proud of about their neighborhood right now, and then also their visions for a happy, healthy and vibrant neighborhood," said Lauren Beliont, the Director of Sustainable Neighborhood Initiatives at Sustain Dane. Beliont is tasked primarily with handling the community conversation surrounding the mural project.

The ideas formulated at the April 11 event will be jotted down with the help of neighborhood leaders, and then revisited a few weeks later when community members will be tasked with converting their ideas into a work of art.

That is where Sharon Kilfoy, director of DAMA and the Williamson Street Art Center, comes in. Kilfoy has made a career out of engaging community members—especially disadvantaged children—in mural projects. Some of Kilfoy's murals can be found at the UW Humanities Building, Centro Hispano as well as a variety of schools across Dane County, to name a few.

Kilfoy said her task in this project is to bring all the different participants, with their varying ideas and talents, together into one cohesive mural.

“I think of myself as being an orchestra conductor,” Kilfoy said. “If all the members of the orchestra were able to play whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted to, nobody would really want to listen to the result.”

“You need someone who has some knowledge and vision and training to be able to help all those voices be heard in a way that's harmonious,” she said.

This will be the second project in which DAMA has partnered with smART to create a mural.

The two organizations worked together in the Darbo-Worthington neighborhood last year [2]. Kilfoy said she was impressed with Sustain Dane's commitment to sustainability and equity.

“I met with them and they talked about having a real commitment to social justice, that unless everybody had a place at the table it's not a sustainable future,” she said.

Because of the size of the transportation building, Kilfoy said she does not expect that mural to be completed until fall. The mural on the Zion City Building she hopes will be finished by the end of summer.

And for Kilfoy, the art comes second to the lives she touches along the way.

“To be able to go back and look at something ten years later and say 'oh I painted that, or I painted that leaf over there or I helped do that background, it sends them the message that they matter, that they matter enough to have a piece of public art,” she said.

The power of art

The Darbo-Worthington neighborhood comes together to create a mural

by [Alexandra Newman](#)

June 19, 2015



Lauren Justice

'Awakening' is the result of a collaborative design process facilitated by Sustain Dane.

A hardscrabble neighborhood is envisioning a better future, embodied in a beautiful mural unveiled last Friday.

Titled “Awakening,” the painted mural on the side of the Salvation Army building in the Darbo-Worthington neighborhood on Madison’s east side was painted by local children and neighborhood members.

The project was directed by local artist Sharon Kilfoy with support from the Madison Arts Commission, Dane Arts, the Wisconsin Arts Board and the Salvation Army. With a swirling palette of blues, greens and yellows, it represents a child dreaming of a neighborhood filled with blooming nature and human activity.

The mural project was spearheaded by Sustain Dane’s smART program. Lauren Beriont, director of the Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative, says the process of working on the mural has strengthened ties in the community. “Collectively, they have identified their neighborhood vision and come together to paint it, to celebrate it and lastly to make it happen.”

Rather than rely on the vision of a professional artist, the mural was a collaborative effort — both in its conception and its creation. Sustain Dane facilitated neighborhood meetings where Darbo-Worthington residents shared thoughts and images of what they felt represented their community. Kilfoy was given the lists of ideas and sorted through them to look for common themes. In the process, she says, Worthington Park came up time and time again: “There was value in what it represented, peacefulness and majesty in those trees. It was also a metaphor of this gathering place where the community could come together and have a chance for peace and solitude.”

Following the success of the Darbo-Worthington community mural, Sustain Dane is now working on a mural at Zion City Community Outreach Center on the south side with the first ever Dane Mural Arts (DAMA) program. Kilfoy is again working with community members, helping residents create visual depictions of healthy, happy communities. The DAMA program plans to paint three to four buildings a year, while training artists and low-income youth in mural arts.

Kilfoy says these efforts convey that neighborhoods matter. “You deserve to have a big major piece of art as part of your neighborhood; you are as important as downtown, State Street or Willy Street; your neighborhood matters, and you believe in yourselves, and we believe in you too.”

In the end, those working on the mural projects hope that art will beautify underserved neighborhoods while training young artists and ultimately creating positive change through community engagement.

- See more at: <http://www.isthmus.com/arts/darbo-worthington-neighborhood-mural/#sthash.odeHKIMY.dpuf>