

# “They will be looking over us now.” New “Colorful Characters” mural honors South Madison heroes

By [David Dahmer](#) - May 12, 2025



There's a beautiful new mural up at the corner of the brand-new Village on Park parking structure, next to the Urban League's Black Business Hub in the heart of Madison's South Side, featuring trailblazing Madisonians who left an incredible impact on the South Madison community. The mural, titled "Colorful Characters," features Wayne Strong, Earsie Green, Alfonso Studeville Jr, Lori Mann-Carey, and Ilda Thomas.

The mural was designed by award-winning "Hip Hop Architect" Michael Ford's [BrandNu Design](#), which was commissioned by the City of Madison to create a dynamic mural celebrating the trailblazing residents of South Madison community.

Wayne Strong's wife, Terri Strong, tells Madison365 she was "very touched" when she first saw the mural featuring her late husband on the five-story parking structure near the corner of Park and Hughes Place.

"The first time I saw the mural, I met Michael Ford over there, and it was breathtaking. I mean *really* breathtaking," she says. "I was overwhelmed with emotion just to see the mural up there. This has been in the planning for some time now. I hardly have words to really explain just how exciting this is and how touching this is.

"While I'm so glad to see Wayne up on the mural, I'm very sad that he's not here today," she adds.



Ford says the project started with a series of community engagement events held in partnership with the Madison Arts Commission. “We held two meetings initially to help us determine who should be represented on the murals as ‘The Heroes of the South Side,’” Ford tells Madison365. “There were so many individuals who made a huge impact on Madison’s South Side, so it was a very difficult decision.”

Ford used the letters in “South Madison” to create vibrant, abstracted shapes, which he combined with photographs from past South Madison leaders to create the four-story mural. The background textile pattern of the mural was generated by extracting shapes from the letters of the names of each of the featured community members.

Ford’s installation marks the completion of the inaugural project funded through Madison’s Percent for Art ordinance. The mural was installed on May 2.

“That’s when people first started snapping photos of it,” Ford says. “One of the first mentions I saw on social media was by Vincent Carey, Lori Mann Carey’s son, who posted a photo of a contractor putting up a picture of his mom and her face was smiling at him next to the window where he was working. That was great.

“And then I was at the actual mural with Terri, Wayne Strong’s wife, and Sedric Morris, Earsie Green’s son, and it was great to see the reactions from the family members’ smiling faces,” he adds. “Our goal was to recognize some of those unsung heroes who may not have received as much recognition as maybe they deserved.”

Featured on the top of the mural is Wayne Strong, who passed away on June 20, 2022 at age 62. He was a longtime police officer and lieutenant on Madison’s South Side. Later in life, he would join Globe University, where he would become the school’s Criminal Justice Program Chair, helping dozens of students work toward their career goals in law enforcement. Strong was also a longtime

coach for the Southside Raiders Football and Cheerleading Program, mentoring hundreds of young people over the years.

"Wayne spent so many years as a neighborhood officer in South Madison trying to build community and trying to reduce the gap between citizens and the police department," says Terri Strong, his wife of 35 years. "He coached the Southside Raiders for so many seasons right here. He really put his all into everything he did here on the South Side.

"He was all about community building, all about creating bridges, knocking down barriers," she adds. "He just had so many plans that he wasn't able to follow through on. But I hope, through his legacy, that he's laid down a foundation and a blueprint and we who are still left can pick up that legacy and continue that work."

Lori Mann Carey, who passed away on November 17, 2020, was a well-known village mother on Madison's South Side, a mentor, and a trailblazer who spent a lifetime fighting for all students to have access to educational opportunities. Mann Carey has been a key figure with [the Mann Educational Opportunity Fund](#), which was started more than 30 years ago to honor her parents, the late Bernard and Kathlyn Mann, long-time Madison African American parents and strong advocates for high-quality and equitable educational opportunities for all students enrolled in MMSD.

"My mom spent her life in service to others — always showing up for our community with grace, strength, and compassion," daughter Ciera Carey tells Madison365. "She never wanted recognition, so I know she'd be humbled by this honor. It's amazing to see her light still shining from the other side, reminding us all to keep doing the work with love."

Becky Mann, Lori Mann Carey's sister, says the Mann family is excited about the mural and that it is "such an honor to see this happening."

"With hearts filled with pride, the Mann family beholds this powerful image of Lori Mann Carey, a radiant testament, alongside other esteemed community leaders of color, gracing the South Side of Madison," Mann tells Madison365. "Lori lived by the words from her favorite Bible verse, 1 Corinthians 13:13, 'Faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.' This guiding principle shone brightly in her boundless love for her children, her family, and the community she embraced and loved so wholeheartedly.





"An entire lifetime woven with deep community connections and selfless service culminates in this moment, and we stand tall, overflowing with joy as the family of Lori Mann Carey," she adds. "God is good!"

Alfonso (Al) Studesville, Jr., was a longtime student services career counselor at Madison College and led an active life of service and mentorship through many organizations, including the NAACP, the Urban League of Greater, and Madison College. He and his wife, Jan, were heavily involved in their community, especially in South Madison. The couple died tragically in a motorcycle accident on June 4, 2013, in rural Texhoma, Texas, while traveling to see the Grand Canyon.

Earsie Green was a beloved chef at the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County who cooked for young people for over 25 years and brought good food, joy, and community to children and families engaged with the Club over the decades. The kitchen where she worked on Madison's South Side is now called "Earsie's Kitchen."

"On behalf of my family, we'd like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Michael Ford for his incredible vision and the beautiful artwork of our mother. Words can't fully express how grateful we are," Sedric Morris, Sr., Earsie Green's son, says in a statement. "Her legacy will continue to live on, and now, through this tribute, she will remain with us, watching over us and living on in the memories of all those whose lives she touched in so many meaningful ways."

Additionally, Morris told Madison365: "This powerful and lasting representation of her spirit not only honors her journey and contributions, but also inspires future generations to carry forward her love, her service, and her unwavering commitment to community. We are deeply moved and forever thankful."

Ilda Thomas founded Centro Hispano in 1983, originally to assist Cuban refugees settling into the Dane County area. Karen Menéndez Collier, Centro Hispano's current executive director, tells Madison365 that "when she thinks of Ilda, she thinks of community."

"That's what Centro on Badger Road stood for, and that's the same with Calli [Centro's new building] today. I always learned to pause and glance at Ilda's picture when I walked into the old Centro Hispano, wondering – what would she do? Now driving down Hughes Place and seeing Ilda as I head to Calli, I wonder what she would think and how would she move the community forward," Menéndez Collier says. "For me, the mural is a meaningful moment to pause, reflect, and then recommit to Ilda's legacy of honoring history and centering the community."

The new mural is a prominent addition to a major thoroughfare in South Madison and has already been seen and photographed by many.

"I think the mural is a beautiful addition to the change that has already started on Madison's South Side," Ford says. "It's adding to a lot of the great projects that have happened in that area and that are coming in, which are being birthed by people who are long-time South Side residents."

"I think it's important to remember people through art and through creative ways that played a huge factor in molding and shaping these communities," he adds.

"Every person that is up there ... every family that is represented ... they are the heart and soul of South Madison," Terri Strong says. "And they will be looking over us now and it's just a comfort to see."