

Creating Mural Alley

BY CATHERINE CAPELLARO AUGUST 23, 2018



BENJAMIN ZASTROW

“East Side of Madison” features images of Indian burial mounds, Rayovac workers, the Garver Feed Mill and Freddie Mae Hill, left, the first African American to graduate from UW-Madison.

It’s going to be tough to remember what the back of the East Side Shopping Center looked like before its transformation. Thank goodness someone thought to post “before” pictures at the grand opening of Mural Alley on Aug. 13.

The photos — propped up on easels near a table where a DJ is spinning hip-hop and pop music — show the boring backside of the shopping center, home of the Hawthorne Branch of the library, which faces East Washington Avenue.

All the back-alley basics remain: cinder block walls and gray utility boxes, dumpsters and a whole lot of concrete. The parking lot behind the shopping center is where some food carts park in off hours. It’s also been home to some unsavory activities, according to Ald. Marsha Rummel, who represents the Darbo-Worthington-Starkweather neighborhood. “This is an amazing day,” says Rummel, grinning ear to ear, and headed for a food cart. “The back of the East Side Shopping Center, which was a ‘no place’ before, and now it becomes a place.”

On this hot August evening, the former “no place” buzzes with activity. Small kiddos draw with chalk on the street, and a racially diverse group of adults and teens stands in line at a

handful of food carts. Urban farmers running a pocket garden demonstration show how to grow flowers and vegetables in galvanized steel tubs. The place is crawling with artists, including many teens and kids who worked on the main attraction — five sparkling new murals, which are being unveiled. All of the murals were designed by pros and painted by local youth groups. Some were completed just in time for the party.

Rummel is especially excited by “East Side of Madison,” an eye-catching mural designed by Viroqua artist Pete Hodapp with assistance from students at the east side campus of **Capital High School**. It’s a sepia-toned tribute to the neighborhood’s roots, featuring images of Indian burial mounds, Rayovac workers, Garver Feed Mill and the Ella’s Deli carousel.

At the center is an enormous portrait of Freddie Mae Hill, the first African American to graduate from UW-Madison. Hill’s family is well-represented at the event, dressed up and posing for pictures in front of their now-famous relative. “We are honored they selected her,” says Elaine Hill Browder, Hill’s niece, noting that the young people sorted through 200 suggestions on who to feature before arriving at Hill. “It really is a big deal. We were pretty excited.” The Hill family **operated a grocery store** from 1915 to 1983 at Dayton and Blount streets, which is now a historic site. Browder, who traveled from Waukegan, Illinois, for the celebration, says she hopes her aunt will be an inspiration to neighborhood kids. “I think it would be great incentive for anyone thinking about going to school, because I often wonder what kind of challenges she must have met going to school. I’m sure it was no easy task.”



The city’s arts administrator, Karin Wolf, is thrilled with the installation. “The neighbors and residents wanted to see a transformation of the area,” says Wolf. “There’s been some problems behind this wall. But a lot of people walk down here and bike down here to get downtown, so it’s a face for many people, even though many people think of it as a ‘behind.’ They wanted beautification, they wanted youth-engaged murals, they wanted a community gathering space.”

The Madison Public Library’s Bubbler and the Madison Arts Commission hired the five teams that created the murals. “I’m happy with the result,” says Andy Villanueva, a UW-Madison student in printmaking who was the lead painter on “Squeeze the Life Outta Lemons,” designed by noted Detroit printmaker Amos Paul Kennedy. “We’ve been getting some really powerful feedback.”

“It feels incredible,” says Jennifer Bastian, an artist and co-founder of the new all-ages sober venue Communication, located on nearby Milwaukee Street. “It’s really beautiful to see this neighborhood have some positive art experience, and also focus on youth and youth involvement.”

Oscar Mireles, principal of Omega School and Madison’s poet laureate, says he’s encouraged by the diverse turnout and the effort to bring the neighborhood together. “It’s impressive. I didn’t know exactly where the alley was,” says Mireles. “I think I got lost here once, but next time I get lost I will find a space where people have taken a dead space and created an opportunity to fix things up and bring people together. That’s the power that art has.”

Tour of mural alley, starting from behind Hawthorne Library

Mural 1 “Better Together” Designed by **Flavia Zimbardi**, Caetano Calomino and Henrique Nardi, with assistance from residents of the Dane County Juvenile Detention Center.

Mural 2: “Squeeze the Life Outta Lemons” Designed by **Amos Paul Kennedy (Kennedy Prints)**, with assistance from Darbo-Worthington neighborhood teens and other Madison teens.

Mural 3: “Canto a Madison” Designed by Richie Morales (Cultura Corazon), with assistance from residents of Dane County Juvenile Court Shelter Home.

Mural 4: “East Side of Madison” Designed by **Pete Hodapp**, with assistance from students at Capitol High School.

Mural 5: “Run the World” Designed by **Lesley Anne Numbers**, with assistance from Goodman Community Center Girls Inc.

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