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Colorful world of animals

New art puts a happy face on Agoura shelter

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There used to just be a simple wooden sign advertising the Animal Care Center on Agoura Road. Now the driveway to the animal shelter is flanked by a kaleidoscopic cat and dog images.

The eye-catching designs are part of the facility's new look as brightly colored murals adorn the buildings, and stylized silhouettes of horses, rabbits and household pets line pathways and hang from tree branches, spinning in the breeze.

The Agoura shelter is one of seven in Los Angeles County to receive a makeover courtesy of Portraits of Hope, a Santa Monica based nonprofit organization founded by brothers Ed and Bernie Massey in 1995.



MAKEOVER—The Agoura Animal Care Center is a happy place to be on July 28 as officials unveil a series of drawings donated by Portraits of Hope, a Los Angeles nonprofit that uses art as creative therapy for children in hospitals and persons with disabilities. Renowned artists and brothers Ed and Bernie Massey, shown above second from left and far right, are leaders of the project. Their goal is to bring colorful pet art to all seven L.A. County animal shelters. Photos by RICHARD GILLARD/Acorn Newspapers

More than 80,000 pets pass through the county's animal care centers each year, the highest rate in the nation.

"We thought it'd be great if we could make the environments as hospitable, inviting and bright as possible to drive more



Courtesy of L.A. County

people to go to the shelters," Bernie Massey said. "Hopefully that means more animals will find a loving home."

The Masseys introduced the facility's transformation at a ceremony on July 28 in which they thanked the volunteers, donors, and county officials who made the project a reality.

L.A. County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl helped champion the effort.

A cat lover, Kuehl was enthusiastic about the project from the start.

"It's public art. Not only seen by the public but created by the public. Art has a way of not only making you feel creative but of opening your heart," Kuehl said. "It's really the same thing in terms of loving an animal, it opens your heart." Much of the art was painted by special needs

children who used the work as a form of creative therapy championed by Portraits of Hope. More than 9,000 people volunteered to



help, nearly half of whom were minors.

In order to let everyone contribute, the designs are prepared at ground level before being applied.

"We always paint on a material or substrate that then gets attached to the wall," Ed Massey said. "That's how we work with people in wheelchairs, or kids. We bring the wall to them."

The surface materials, paints and brushes were donated by foundations and businesses that share similar values as Portraits of Hope. Maddie's Fund, an animal welfare foundation based in Pleasanton, Calif., donated \$300,000 to the effort.

Mary Ippoliti Smith, a member of the Maddie's Fund team, explained that it was the foundation's first project in Southern California.

"We couldn't turn down such a great idea," Smith said. "It's not something that was necessarily part of our guidelines but we thought it was such an amazing opportunity to bring community and

"We'll go where the need is most acute. Let's help get those animals adopted and get the volunteers educated about the issue," Ed Massey said. "We'll decide based on where we think the need is greatest, and based on financial support, where donors want us to go."



ARTISTS IN CHIEF—Bernie Massey, left, and his brother Ed are pleased to unveil the animal shelter art at a July 28 ceremony in Agoura Hills. RICHARD GILLARD/Acorn Newspapers

pets and art together."

To be sure, volunteers at the Agoura shelter say they've noticed more people visiting the facility since the installation started, and the makeover isn't even finished.

More murals will be hung over the coming week, and other county shelters will be finished in the next two months. Each has a unique design that reflects the surrounding community. Ed Massey described Agoura's theme as rustic, while others are more urban.

Even though the project isn't finished, the Masseys are already looking to the future. They plan to repeat the project in cities across the country, though they aren't sure where yet.