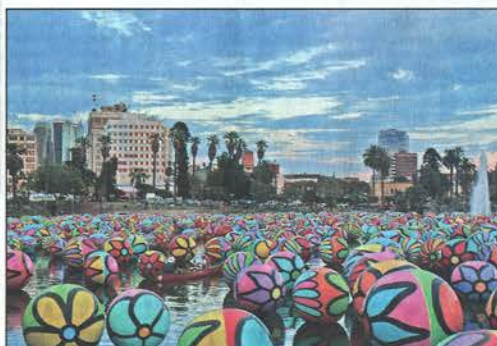


## Ed Massey, Vibrancy Wizard, Takes on LA's Animal Shelters



NYC laundromat's makeover

Photo by Robin Ehler



Last year's spheres at MacArthur Park

Photo by Felix Massey



2010's Summer of Color

Photo by Loren Philip

By LILA SEIDMAN  
Reporter

"People say this is the happiest place on Earth," Palisadian artist/activist Ed Massey said at Plaza El Segundo during a recent volunteer painting session for his and his brother Bernie's latest art-centric charitable push to beautify the seven Los Angeles County animal shelters with vibrant 2-D and 3-D art.

Walk in to the South Bay-based studio and color hits your corneas hard: Day-Glo pink, orange, green, yellow and purple. Brightly painted panels of dogs, cats, rabbits and bones are hung, stacked and underhand, as children and community members apply color. Massey's signature flower design bursts from the walls and ceiling, in paintings and photographs of and ephemera from previous projects—even winking inside an onsite fish tank. Bubble gum '60s pop hums.

This is the Massey brothers' world and their co-founded initiative *Portraits of Hope* (POH) headquarters. And it's pretty darned happy.

The brother-duo conceived of the Animal Shelter Revitalization project four years ago, inspired by the thousands of children who have participated in POH's creative therapy and civic leadership sessions they conduct in schools and hospitals.

In the program, which launched in 1995, children learn about pressing social issues. According to Bernie, no matter where they are in the country, children list animal rights and welfare as a top priority. Kids they visit in hospitals often draw or paint animals unprompted. Their experience has revealed young people universally empathize with animals.

Ed, an El Medero resident who heads up the artistic components of all POH projects, explained that animal shelters can be "off-putting or upsetting" because of their drab, monochromatic aesthetic.

"They're not very happy exteriors," he said adding that now, "they'll have a spark of color—and it's all done by community." (Bernie, who is based in Beverly Hills, focuses mostly on POH's policy and education components.)

By March 2017, LA County's shelters—Agoura, Baldwin Park, Palmdale Carson/Gardena, Castaic, Downey and Lancaster—should be transformed, Bernie said. The goal is to revamp 30 shelters across the country in the next three years, including additional locations in LA and Southern California.

They're starting with LA County because it's "the belly of the beast," Ed said; it processes more animals than any other jurisdiction in the U.S.—80,000 per year. That's many more animals than available homes.

Ed's work tends to attract large amounts of spectators, and he hopes this project will follow suit. But this time there's a motive: those who come for the art, leave with a pet.

Ed stressed that it's by no means a solo endeavor, and Bernie agreed, "There's a lot of karma involved in what we do."

POH is a nonprofit, and accepts no government dollars. The studio space was donated, along with all the art materials. They anticipate working with 14,000

volunteers to paint and install 8,000 panels.

The LA County Board of Supervisors gave rare unanimous approval for the project just two months after the Masseys submitted the idea. Maddie's Fund, Niagara Cares, The Goldrich Family Foundation, Federal Realty and Vista Paint provided financial support. Other companies, like California-based Image Options, donated thousands of dollars worth of materials.

Palisadians are "painting" their part. Ed, who currently lives in Pacific Palisades and attended the Montessori school on Marquee Avenue, said almost, if not every, school in the Palisades contributes to POH projects, including Marquee Charter Elementary School, Palisades Charter Elementary School, Calvary Christian School, Paul Revere Charter Middle School and Village School.

The kids trek down to the studio in El Segundo to paint and learn about public policy. Many of them are POH veterans. All of the Ed's LA-based projects—from last year's Spheres at MacArthur

Park to 2010's *Summer of Color* that included LA County lifeguard towers on 31 miles of beach to 2000's Tower of Hope, which saw the flowerification of Beverly Hills High School's onsite oil well—have involved kids from the Palisades and all over LA. Angelenos are better acquainted with Ed's work than they likely consciously realize.

(Vibrant leftovers from previous projects now litter the studio and Ed's home, where many POH initiatives are hatched.) Ed said that while Palisadian families have embraced the project, he urges parents to come down to the Plaza El Segundo studio in person, noting that he makes the journey on a near-daily basis and some volunteers commute nearly two hours.

"It's nice for Palisadian families to meet other families who live outside of the Palisades," said Ed, pointing out that the set-up is social and makes for a great all-day family outing.

Palisadian Deanna Emad, whose kids attend Marquee Elementary, was at one of the recent sessions and painted about

six panels.

"I had witnessed the lifeguard stations, but I didn't know you could come in and do this," Emad told the *Post*, explaining that she finds painting soothing. "Ed is a visionary."

Her son, Roy, 9, said, "It was actually pretty fun painting. I like this place. [The paintings] are going to go to dog shelter, to decorate it, and that's really nice."

Ed left the Palisades before first grade, but returned to roost—and even married another native Palisadian, Dawn Harris Massey. They have two children, Felix and Georgi, and a dog.

They're planning on expanding their family in the next few months: Ed said they will adopt one or more furry friend once they start installing the finished art pieces into the shelters.

There's only one qualifier: "No horses in our family," he said.

But families looking for equine or livestock adoptions are in luck. Lancaster, Palmdale and Baldwin Park shelter all have "animals that wouldn't fit in our yard," he said.



Commemorating the Wright Brothers' 100th anniversary flight at Kitty Hawk

Photo by Paul Bowen



The Garden in Transit project in 2007

Photo courtesy of Jez Coulson, Inaght