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LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Portraits of Hope to tint shelters

El Segundo: Brothers to lead effort to brighten area animal facilities
Massey project: Colorful panels are inspired by children's therapy

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Brothers Ed and Bernie Massey are coming back to El Segundo with a new Portraits of Hope mission, this one inspired by children. The masterminds behind the L.A. lifeguard tower Summer of Color and last year's Spheres at MacArthur Park will now fo-

cus on animals.

They've teamed up with Los Angeles County to wrap every county animal shelter in original vibrant, colorful panels painted by children and community members.

The idea was formed three years ago, and, since then, the brothers have met with several animal activist groups to ensure it would be the right fit.

"It was met with a lot of en-

thusiasm," Bernie said. "It's such a different angle to try to promote pet adoption and get all ages concerned about the animal welfare issues and pet adoptions."

"Often times, the atmosphere at the shelter could use a little bit of an uplifting spirit, and that's for the volunteers there, too, who walk the dogs and feed the cats. We said, 'Let's really make them

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Danielle Totman holds her daughter, Rylee, 4, as Rylee gets more paint on her brush to paint a giant inflatable ball at Miller Children's Hospital in Long Beach.

STAFF FILE PHOTO

Hope

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much more hospitable and inviting and colorful."

The often bland, nondescript buildings will pop with bright outside panels, raising awareness and drawing the community into the animal shelters. Inside the facilities, wall hangings, floor and ceiling coverings and sculptural elements will complete the look for a fun, organic approach to public art.

It's all free for the county and for the shelters, thanks to private donations and partnerships from those who believe in the Masseys' projects. All of the paint is donated. The space in El Segundo is donated, thanks to the owners of Plaza El Segundo. The painters are volunteers.

Every bit of the project's success relies on the buy-in from those who want to actively make a difference in the world around them.

"We want the community to really participate in a big, big way," Ed said. "We want anyone who has free time to help us because it's a big project, big initiative, and it will expand."

"We encourage, we request, we want the South Bay community to embrace this project. We're here. We have this magnificent space. When we're in production and project mode, we're open seven days a week. We (will) have night sessions for adults, weekend sessions, sometimes team building, sometimes a partner. Right now we're really looking for those partners to make this thing happen."

The South Bay location is ideal, the Masseys said, because it is close to Los Angeles International Airport and the freeway. It's easy for school buses that come from all over L.A. as well as those who drive hours to participate. Being close to the beach is a draw. Neighboring restaurants offer discounts to painters.

Ed's excited, that for the first time since its inception, Portraits of Hope will have a direct impact on a life in danger.

"It's going to feel so good that these kids will know that lives have been saved," he said. "It's very different from anything we've done. I think it's really important for Portraits of Hope that something of that magnitude, a really wonderful human effort of saving a life, is part of our program."

Portraits of Hope started as creative therapy for children and adults coping with illness and adversity. It has since grown to encompass all people who want to have a first-hand art experience designed to improve communities.

The flowers used across Portraits of Hope installations stemmed from a recurrent theme Ed and Bernie noticed in children in hospitals. Across cultures, nations, age and gender, they saw that kids battling illness drew flowers when they doodled.

"It was sort of that iconic, universal symbol of healing and beauty and hope and love and inspiration and patience," Ed said. "It's everything beautiful,

and people can recognize the flower in every region of the world. The flower makes sense."

Today, much of the painting is done in studios, but kids in the hospitals are still key volunteers projects and continue to paint.

As projects evolved beyond creative therapy and installations grew, the Masseys added elements. Fish and marine life showed up on the lifeguard towers and at MacArthur Park. Shapes were added to represent how children will "shape the future" of the world.

The shelter project will include flowers and shapes and incorporate dogs, cats and bunnies.

Designs are bold and simple, and volunteers are tasked with coloring within preprinted lines using bright rainbow hues. Some older children will create their own templates or sculptural elements as the project grows and shifts organically.

Everything the Masseys do ties back to a reason, a social need, a moment for education and reflection.

Before painting begins, classes discuss social priorities. Students are given \$100 virtual dollars to spend on 14 government initiatives: foreign aid, health care, poverty, ethnic relations and equality, education, the environment, violence and crime, senior citizen care, national security, infrastructure, biotech, gender equality and women's issues, animal rights and medical research. They must de-

termine how much money to allocate to each, then discuss and debate classmates' priorities. It's a lesson in civics and democracy.

Those 14 priorities are connected in some way to every Portraits of Hope initiative. The focus on animal rights came directly from Ed and Bernie seeing how important it was to kids during the educational sessions.

Bernie said they found animal rights were universal and accessible for children of all ages, abilities and socioeconomic backgrounds. Kids on field trips may not comprehend foreign aid, biotech or ethnic relations, but they understand animals.

Plus, it's a perfect way for hospitalized kids to actively make a difference in saving another life.

"There's something almost poetic about it ... here you have kids in the hospitals, who are in a very vulnerable state themselves, helping a different population from the animal kingdom who are very vulnerable awaiting adoption for their very survival," Bernie said.

"The kids in the hospitals as well as the kids in the schools are going to be able to hopefully make the facility so much more appealing and recognizable."

The Masseys hope to begin painting for the shelter project by the end of June. The entire process will take about two years and 2,000 painters per shelter. Panels will be painted in the Plaza at El Segundo studio, then transferred to