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**Snowmass Sun**

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## **Aspen/Snowmass firetrucks, ambulances sporting a new look for summer**



John Mele/Courtesy photo Panels were applied to Snowmass Fire Marshal John Mele's car in time for the second day of the Snowmass Mammoth Fest.



Jill Beathard/Snowmass Sun An installation company worked to apply panels to a truck owned by the Aspen Fire Protection District on June 7 at the North 40 Fire Station. The panels, painted by a project called Portraits of Hope, are being applied to local emergency vehicles over the coming days and will stay on all summer long.



Kristin Lafayette/Courtesy photo An Aspen Fire engine sits completed at the North 40 Fire Station.

Local emergency-service personnel are hitting the streets in style thanks to a new look on their vehicles.

Their trucks and cars are being covered in murals of large flowers that will stay in place all summer long. The murals were painted by students from local and Los Angeles schools, hospital patients in Denver and Los Angeles and others, including some of the personnel, all through a project called Portraits of Hope.

Portraits of Hope is an organization through which young hospital patients and students paint murals that become high-profile works of art, which provides creative therapy for the patients and educates young people about civic responsibility. Fire engines, ambulances, cars and ATVs owned by the Snowmass Wildcat Fire Protection District, the Aspen Ambulance District, Mountain Rescue Aspen and the Aspen Fire Protection District are all being transformed right now in the North 40 Fire Station.

“It’s a little odd driving around with flowers on your car,” said Snowmass Chief Steve Sowles. He said he feels like he’s “back in the ’60s.”

Most of the panels on Sowles’ vehicle were painted by Challenge Aspen staff and participants. Bernie Massey, founder of Portraits of Hope, said Roaring Fork Valley organizations Extreme Sports Camp, the Buddy Program and Ready for the World also participated in painting sessions.

Aspen Middle School parent Kristen Lassalette advocated for the students to take part in the program, and Principal Tom Heald decided to get the entire student body involved. The middle schoolers painted panels in a gym together this spring.

“I just thought we were so fortunate to have it come to our valley,” Lafayette said. “It brought so many different walks of life together.”

Sixth-grader Julia Kryz, of Aspen, also felt that way about the project.

“I thought that it was really special how everyone could come together, even the kids in our grade you think of (as) troublemakers,” Julia said. “We all worked as a unit.”

Julia said learning about what sick children in hospitals go through helped put life in perspective.

“It’s crazy that everyone has this connection to each other,” she said.

Julia's teacher Mark Munger got particularly involved in the project, incorporating it into the community service he already does with his students. His class wrote get-well cards for young patients in Colorado Children's Hospital and the Denver Health Medical Center.

Munger works with Pathfinders annually to bring in injured or ill people, primarily cancer patients, from the valley to speak to the kids.

"I think they learn, and they know this, too, that there's a lot of people right here in the community (who are sick)," he said. "They get a feeling of sympathy, and they get a feeling of doing service, that they can be positive in the world."

Brandon Potter was one of three Snowmass firefighters who joined the middle schoolers in painting panels this spring. He said he was glad to have more of a connection to the project by participating in that.

"I think that we're in a unique position in that the panels being on the emergency vehicles probably brings more awareness to the cause," Potter said.

Getting the "tough guy, type A" personalities of a fire department in trucks with flowers on them brings the message across even more, Potter said.

Patients from the Braille Institute, Shriner's in Los Angeles, Denver Health Medical Center, Colorado Children's Hospital and various Roaring Fork Valley organizations got to take part in painting the panels that are being applied in Aspen/Snowmass. The panels on Snowmass Fire Marshal John Mele's vehicle were created by Braille Institute patients. The black lines were applied in a textured medium so that blind children could follow them and paint in the right places.

"I was really skeptical," Mele said of the project. "After seeing the reaction of the people (at Snowmass Mammoth Fest), you could really see the smiles and the acceptance of what Portraits of Hope is doing. ... I think it's going to be really great."

The portraits will be on the vehicles through October, Massey said. The Aspen Ambulance District hopes to keep a couple intact for the Winter X Games in 2014. Sowles said he's working to get some visibility for the project during the USA Pro Challenge in August.