



Soaring Dreams Airship is the largest flying public art project ever created.

Hope floats

The Massey brothers bring hope to children throughout the world, via colorful art projects

by LISA ALCALAY KLUG



Portraits of Hope founders Bernie Massey (left) and his brother, Ed.

Brothers Ed and Bernie Massey may just be the most innovative “florists” on earth. Their brightly colored flowers adorn everything from a tugboat in New York’s Hudson River and fire trucks in Colorado to a historic airplane celebrating the 100th anniversary of flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, and a 220-foot blimp sailing coast to coast.

But the Massey men’s installations represent much more than playful optics. Their nonprofit, Portraits of Hope (POH; portraitsofhope.org), partners with volunteers to prepare their signature paintings. They install completed panels as public art to send a message of optimism anywhere, including animal shelters in Los Angeles; an elementary school and sports arena in Osaka, Japan; and a hospital in Mexico City.

Every project promotes one grand

idea: Working together effects positive social change.

“It’s all about teamwork and collaboration,” says Bernie. “We are following a family tradition. Our mom started as a social worker and instilled values of caring about your fellow man and woman.”

A puzzle project with many pieces

Since 1995, the Masseys, who are Costco members, have collaborated on more than 25 large-scale installations and many smaller ones worldwide.

More than 100,000 participants of all ages, corporate sponsors, scout troops, foundations and volunteers have joined group painting sessions at rehabilitative centers, the Braille Institute, Special Olympics, universities, after-school programs and classrooms.

“Grades 2 to 12 are really our sweet spot,” says Bernie. “In every project, more

than 60 percent of our participants are school kids.”

While they may seem simple, the copyrighted designs vary from project to project. “We also use a lot of geometric shapes, like rectangles, squares and circles, because kids shape the future,” Bernie says.

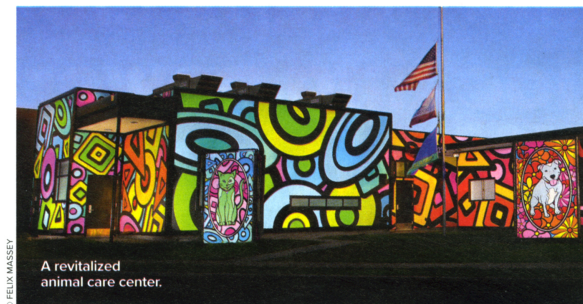
Painting is only part of the puzzle. Projects incorporate educational sessions to explore relevant themes. Bernie leads volunteers through workshops exploring social issues affecting their lives, including the environment, pluralism and other topics tied to each installation. “The educational programming we do in schools makes the world relevant,” he says.

“There’s nothing better than working with your brother to help achieve these goals,” says Ed, a painter and sculptor and author of two children’s books.

Accomplished projects

The project grew after Ed read the first of his two titles to children at a hospital. He thought of creating ways young patients could be part of something more engaging, beyond the confines of a hospital.

The Masseys’ greatest hits include decorating 5,400 Manhattan taxicabs in 2007 and recruiting 11,000 people to adorn 156 lifeguard towers spanning 31 continuous miles of the Southern California coastline in 2010. Last year, at Los Angeles’ MacArthur Park lake,



A revitalized animal care center.

which is the size of several football fields, they floated 3,000 vinyl spheres.

Emphasis on the world

After an installation, the art takes on new life. Based in Redondo Beach, California, POH donates 80 percent of its pieces to beautify social service institutions in places as far-flung as Kenya and South Korea. Charities usually auction off the remainder.

“We want to keep adding color across the globe, and by doing so we work with kids everywhere,” says Bernie. “Portraits of Hope is a way to shrink our world. We are all connected, and we need to remember that. Our projects are a visual symbol of what can be done when we all cooperate.” ■

Lisa Alcalay Klug is a regular contributor to the *Costco Connection*.



A patient contributes to a Portraits of Hope hospital project in Mexico City.

OUR DIGITAL EDITIONS

Click to view the MacArthur Park lake sphere project. (See page 11 for details.)

Accessibility

“I love the collaborative experience,” says Bernie Massey. “We work with every demographic, culture, religion, geographic region, wealth or lack thereof.” Accessibility is also paramount. Portraits of Hope

offers disabled participants specially designed paintbrushes to control with their mouths.

Telescoping handles or brushes attached to hockey sticks allow volunteers in wheelchairs to paint while seated.

Braille elements incorporated into the black outlines help guide the blind.

And paintbrushes adapted to be attached to shoes provide more options to participate.

“We never turn anyone away,” Massey says.

Individuals who are interested in volunteering for an event, or schools, after-school programs, hospitals and community institutions that would like to sign up to participate in a POH project, can go to portraitsofhope.org and click “Get Involved.” —LAK