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ST UPDATE

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By MaryKate Moran



NYC in Full Bloom Cleveland youngsters help decorate taxicabs.

Six-year-old Isaiah, a kindergarten student at Cleveland's Newton D. Baker Elementary School of Arts, has never traveled to NYC, but, come fall, his art-work will adorn the Big Apple's famous yellow taxis.

Isaiah and approximately 60 classmates took part in Garden in Transit, a temporary, public-art project that will be displayed on NYC's taxicabs from September through December 2007. This privately funded project will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the city's first metered taxi.

Portraits of Hope, a nonprofit group started by brothers Ed and Bernie Massey in 1995, encourages hospitalized children to create public art. Now, the group has received the go-ahead from New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg to decorate the city's cabs, which is allowed only once every 100 years.

But how to decorate approximately 13,000 taxis? That's where Stow, OH-based MACTac comes in. MACTac products will be used exclusively for the project, namely the IMAGin® B-Free vinyl, with the company donating a portion of it.

MACTac volunteers were also on hand May 23, to help students personally stamp some history-making art.

Carrol Chang, from the Garden in Transit team, encouraged the children to paint lightly so the brush-strokes showed. "That way everyone can tell it was painted by a real person," she explained.

Many students suddenly wished to visit the Big Apple to see their artwork. "We're gonna be famous?" was a common refrain among the kids.



Portrait of Hope's Laura Weidman, left, and Carrol Chang show students how to paint with a personal touch.



Protecting their clothes with over-sized Garden in Transit shirts, these boys painted flowers in their favorite colors. Right, second-graders paint their own taxicabs.



Portraits of Hope's creative therapy project reaches out to hospitals and schools. While creating art, participants learn lessons about social issues.

While kindergartners turned the vinyl rows into a vibrant, two-dimensional garden, second-graders painted toy taxis, which represented the possibility for change. Students discussed issues such as poverty, racism and war with the help of the Masseys and other volunteers. Later, they switched, and the second-graders painted some vinyl.

"The cabs symbolize taking [an] issue and moving it from here to here," Bernie Massey said, using his arms to measure potential progress.

Newton D. Baker Elementary was one of the few schools outside NYC to participate in the project, partly because art therapy permeates its curriculum, said Tanika Snyder, speaking on MACTac's behalf.

The charity has developed numerous brushes for hospitalized children, from shoe brushes, long, "telescope" brushes, even flavored mouth brushes, so that every child – and their families – can take part, regardless of their illness or injury.

– MaryKate Moran and Curtis Penick