



Staten Island Advance

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THE ISLAND

Students fare well in taxicab art project

Dreyfus Intermediate kids participate in huge project to crown thousands of cabs with floral designs

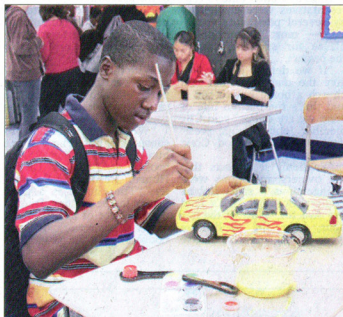
By YQAV GONEN
STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

First came the 500 life-size fiberglass cows dispersed throughout city neighborhoods in 2000. Then there were the 7,503 saffron-colored gates the winter before last in Central Park. And so sculpted dolphins dotted Staten Island in a fund-raising contest only last year.

The newest mammoth public art project will crown the tops of thousands of yellow cabs with brightly colored floral designs, beginning in September 2007, in what has been dubbed a Garden in Transit.

Yesterday about 200 students at Dreyfus Intermediate School in Stapleton helped put some of the early touches on the project. They painted vibrant colors onto the black and white panels strewn across the gymnasium floor, and signed their names to mark their creations.

"It's nice to have artwork on cabs driving around the city where everybody can see," said Desuan Baker, a 14-year-old eighth-grader at the school. "I'd be happy seeing my painting on a car."



Major Yancy, a 14-year-old eighth-grader at Dreyfus Intermediate School, paints a miniature model of a taxi as part of the Garden in Transit project.

The project, which is six years in the making and will involve roughly 30,000 students in schools, hospitals and off-hour programs, will coincide with Taxi '07 — the 100th anniversary of the city's first metered taxi.

Brothers Ed and Bernie Massey, co-founders of the nonprofit organization Portraits of Hope, have described their project alternately as art — a kaleidoscope of cars

meant to beautify the city and inspire its citizens — and education, achieved by including students in a large-scale, collaborative work that engages them with the environment.

"They're very responsive" to it, said Principal Linda Hill of her students. "They like the notoriety, they like the ability to [create], and they like the fact it's going to be public art."

Another educational aspect



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Students at the Stapleton school paint bright colors onto panels on the gymnasium floor. Holding the brushes are Maryann Hill, 14, and Michael Sanabria, 13. The others, from the left, are Police Officer Denise Taylor, Andrea Courtney, Ed Massey, Laura Weidman and Police Sgt. Gerard Nicholson.

of the program provided students with miniature models of taxis, and asked that they paint them to represent one social issue that they'd like to tackle. They also wrote essays on the topic, and spoke in front of the class about why they selected a particular issue.

"The point of this exercise is to make the world relevant, to get them to start thinking of these issues critically," said

Bernie Massey. "It really gives you a mirror into what this generation of kids is thinking about."

In the class he led yesterday, issues that topped the list included poverty, women's rights and education.

Eighth-grade student Jasmine Balatucan symbolized her quest for a cure for cancer by painting her taxi with a pale blue and yellow hood, for hope; a black trunk, for sick-

ness, and a "love" license plate and red heart, to symbolize the way her family rallied around her uncle when he successfully underwent radiation treatment.

She told the class: "My uncle has cancer and he just got out of it so I want them to research it for a cure."

Yqav Gonen covers education news for the Advance. He may be reached at gonen@islandnews.com.

Taxis to bloom with Dreyfus students' help

Cows, gates and dolphins, make way for taxicabs! Garden in Transit, the city's newest public art project, will top thousands of yellow cabs with brightly colored floral designs, beginning in September 2007.

The six-year project will involve about 30,000 students in schools, hospitals and off-hour programs and be part of Taxi '07, the 100th anniversary of the city's first metered taxi.

Brothers Ed and Bernie Massey, co-founders of the nonprofit organization Portraits of Hope, have described the project as art — a kaleidoscope of cars.

Yesterday, about 200 students at Dreyfus Intermediate School in Stapleton did their part to help give it a good start.

Some students painted bright colors onto panels on the gym floor, then signed their names to mark their creations. Others painted miniature models of taxis to represent social issues they'd like to tackle. They also wrote essays on the topic and described for classmates why they had chosen their particular issues — such as poverty, women's rights and education.

The point is to get the students thinking seriously about the issues, Bernie Massey said.

"They're also excited and having fun. 'They like the ability to create and they like the fact it's going to be public art,'" Dreyfus Principal Linda Hill said. (See Page A 4.)



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Portraits of Hope co-founder Bernie Massey smiles as Dreyfus Intermediate students focus their attention on painting miniature taxis, part of the huge "Garden in Transit" art project.

STUDENTS' TALENTS TO ADORN DRAB YELLOW CABS



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Staten Island students are applying their talents to the city's latest mammoth public art project, which will crown the tops of thousands of yellow cabs with brightly colored floral designs beginning in September 2007. Working on designs for the Garden in Transit effort are Jasmine Balatucan, left, and Sandra Soriano, both eighth-graders at Dreyfus Intermediate School in Stapleton. For more on the endeavor, see Page A 4.