

Time Out Kids

New York

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Handsome cabs

There's bound to be a gridlock alert now that NYC's taxis have been given a colorful makeover. By **Dawn M. Roode**



Art on the go Thousands of area students helped transform the city's ubiquitous yellow icon into a mobile canvas.



Forget sailors sporting pristine white uniforms—this fall ushers in a fleet week of a different kind. Starting on Saturday 1, thousands of taxis decorated with bright colors will roll down the streets of New York City. Thanks to a program called Garden in Transit, more than 40,000 kids (mostly local, but some from across the country) have taken part in a year-long effort to paint bold flowers on special adhesive panels to adorn the roofs of otherwise yellow cabs.

The taxis will steer their mobile community gardens throughout the area until the end of the year—which gives your clan plenty of time to stop by Top of the Rock for a birds'-eye view. Just as Christo's saffron *Gates*

transformed the paths of Central Park in 2005, this massive public-art project promises to help jaded New Yorkers see their beloved cityscape in a whole new light.

Ninety percent of the youngsters involved so far in Garden in Transit have come by way of NYC's public schools, youth programs and hospitals. "My students loved putting their names on the flowers they painted, and they took pride in painting carefully," says Terri Frohman, an art teacher at the Henry School for International Studies in Manhattan. "Kids think about things mainly in the moment, so for them, grasping that their artwork would be shown all over the city was a far-off

reality. It will be a surprise to them when they see it."

Of course, locating their creations is bound to be an adventure in itself. "I don't know how I could ever find the one with my name on it," says eight-year-old Bronx participant Joseph. "But I'm sure going to look. Yes, I am."

Hailed as the largest community-art endeavor in NYC history and an example of private and public sectors working together to engage young citizens, the initiative was the brainchild of Ed and Bernie Massey, founders of the nonprofit Portraits of Hope. The group's mission is to utilize art to motivate and educate children—creating the flowers, in this case, was a springboard for socially relevant conversations.

Besides putting brush to canvas, students have also participated in group dialogues about how they—one person at a time—can change the world. They've talked about what issues matter most to them (racial equality and ending poverty were at the top of 15-year-old Bronx student D'Andrea Lewin's list, for example) and pledged to do what they can to keep effecting positive change.

"I believe they did understand that they were doing something together that would impact our city in a positive way," says Frohman.

The sheer beauty of the undertaking is impressive: as Ed Massey describes it, "a magnificent array of colors, painted by kids, sprouting up in the middle of city streets, where concrete, cement and steel are omnipresent."

While it's too late to create designs for Garden in Transit, there still are ways for kids to get involved. Portraits of Hope is encouraging a grassroots movement to recruit cabbies to join in—think hordes of tiny tots waving placards of brown kraft paper festooned with hand-painted bubble letters: WANTED: TAXIS OR HELP US PLANT THE SEED. (Families or youth groups can call 212-216-9441 to arrange poster-making sessions.) These curbside campaigns just might become the parties of the year for the socially conscious set (and a slice of nostalgia for the city's boomer parents).

"The taxi drivers are the real ambassadors," says Portraits of Hope spokesperson Carrol Chang. "Only with them can we send this bright message out into the city streets."

If a jam-packed schedule (or a shy demeanor) precludes your family from hitting the block in demonstration, next time you hail a cab, go ahead and act like a tourist: Encourage your little one to strike up a conversation with the driver about the project. After all, who could say no to that face?

COURTESY OF GARDEN IN TRANSIT