

On the Job: Portraits of Hope



By: **Mike Antoniak**
Friday, October 1, 2010



Lifeguard tower stations in Los Angeles County were treated to a visual make-over—transformed from their traditional blue to an array of vibrant colors and graphics in a public celebration of art and community spirit. (Photo courtesy of Project Hope)



Ed and Bernie Massey pose with volunteer Sydney Gonzales

Millions of visitors to Los Angeles County's 31 miles of Pacific coastline found the scenery dramatically different this summer, as all 157 of the coastline's lifeguard tower stations were treated to a visual make-over. They surrendered their traditional blue for vibrant colors and graphics in a public celebration of the arts, generosity and the community spirit.

The "Summer of Color" is just the latest project put together by Santa Monica-based Portraits of Hope, a nonprofit organization founded by brothers Ed and Bernie Massey. The group specializes in public arts projects as therapy for hospitalized and disabled children, and as civic education for people of all ages to encourage community involvement.

In the past, Portraits of Hope volunteers have wrapped buildings, airplanes, blimps, race cars and the fleet of New York taxis with its trademark graphics to beautify the surroundings and instill the pride of public service and accomplishment in all participants. For this project, more than 6,000 children—including many who are hospitalized or disabled—and 2,500 adults helped to create the graphics used to transform the lifeguard towers into uniquely colorful landmarks.

"I hope the sign industry realizes how important their contributions are," says Ed Massey. "They really came to bat in the biggest way for us."

"They" includes a roster of local and national companies directly or indirectly affiliated with the sign business: wide-format printer manufacturer **EFI/VUTEK** (<http://www.efi.com/products/production/superwide/vutek/>); media distributor **Laird Plastics** (<http://www.lairdplastics.com/>) and **T&S Die Cutting** (<http://tandsdiecutting.com/index.html>), both based in Santa Fe Springs; digital print specialists **Image Options** (<http://www.imageoptions.net/>) of Foothill Ranch, Calif.; vinyl film manufacturer Seemee U.S.; Nazdar Inks and Coatings; and engineer and installer Chris Bonas of **Bigsticker** (<http://www.bigsticker.com>), Corona Del Mar, Calif. By the time the project was completed, more than 3,500 4' x 8' sheets of 6-mil fluted Coroplast were printed and painted for the tower walls, along with 20,000 square feet of vinyl roof covering.

AN EVOLVING PROJECT

During the early planning stages, when the project entailed wrapping only some towers, Massey consulted with Bonas about how to go about wrapping each tower. He advised using rigid media, a suggestion that ultimately put Massey in touch with Laird's Santa Fe Springs office for the boards for printing and painting.



Image Options of Foothill Ranch, Calif. did all the printing. By the time the project was completed, more than 3,500 4' x 8' sheets of 6-mil fluted Coroplast were printed and painted for the tower walls. (Photo courtesy of Image Options)

At the last minute, the original substrate manufacturer withdrew, and Laird manager Andy Boyle stepped up and agreed to source the material, free of charge. "We had some history working with Portraits of Hope on the New York City taxis, and like everything they stand for," says Boyle.

Although, the goal was well defined at that point, just how to pull off a project on such a massive scale wasn't.



Image Options used a MultiCam cutter to shape many of the colorful headers that had been printed on rigid substrates.

"These types of projects are always a work in progress, and always more involved," than they appear at the outset, Boyle notes.

The plans seemed straightforward enough: wrapping the lifeguard station sides with panels, and the roofs with vinyl, with no two designs the same. But, no two towers are exactly alike; dimensions vary, as well as the placement of doors and windows. And, the panels had to be pre-printed with design templates before they could be individually painted, off-site, by volunteers.

Boyle recommended die stamping the panels into interlocking pieces prior to printing. He referred Massey to T&S Die Cutting, which donated that service for free.

"The biggest piece of the puzzle was finding someone to do the printing," Boyle says. "I put Ed in touch with one of our customers, Tim Bennett at Image Options. This seemed like the type of project they would like to be involved in."

Massey contacted Bennett, mentioned the referral, explained his organization and encouraged him to check out the organizations and its projects on its website, www.portraitsofhope.org.

"We try to give back as much as we can through a number of different programs," says Bennett, who agreed to donate print services. "Once we spoke, I realized the tremendous work they are doing with Portraits of Hope, and I felt we should be more involved than just doing the printing."



Part of the reason for the public arts project is to involve local citizens in the creation of each piece, and as therapy for hospitalized and disabled children.

SUPPORT FROM SUPPLIERS

Bennett solicited support from his contacts in the industry for this very worthy cause. He e-mailed Scott Schinlever, vice president/general manager for EFI Rastek & EFI Ink Business later that day to see if they would donate the ink. Schinlever got right back to him with a definitive yes.

"After reading about the project, we were delighted to be a part of such a unique civic and public art project—especially one that involved children and adults facing physical and medical challenges," says Schinlever.

He also contacted vinyl supplier Seemee U.S. to solicit donations of wide-format vinyl for the roofs, and Nazdar Inks and Coatings for the clear coat to protect the graphics. Both generously agreed. With all the pieces in place, printing could begin even as the scope of the project continued to evolve.

Brian Hite, co-owner of Image Options, worked with staff designer and production coordinator Wendy Sedlack at Image Options and designer Deborah Ricketts at Portraits of Hope to coordinate the workflow at their end. "They came up with a system for numbering each panel so they would know which tower it was for and which way it would face," says Bennett.

Laird shipped the sheets to T&S for die cutting, from there to Image Options for printing on a VUTEk QS3200 flatbed, then clear coating. Vinyl was printed with Image Option's 16-foot wide VUTEk 5330. Finally they were returned to Laird, where they would be warehoused until it was time to ship them to different locations for painting by volunteers. The completed panels were cleaned, and again returned to Laird where they were organized and stored for delivery to the installation sites.

"Just the logistics of moving all the panels around, getting them to the right place at the right time, in the right order, was probably the biggest challenge of this project for us," says Boyle. "By the time we were through, there were close to 3,500 boards involved, and 20 rolls of vinyl. This project ended up being much larger than any of us had originally thought, with all the towers involved. New artwork, for more towers, was being created as the boards were printed."

REWARDING EXPERIENCES

By late December, the first of the boards were ready for the volunteers. Over the next five months, volunteers of all ages and skill levels contributed their talents to bring those panels to life with paint, donated by Benjamin Moore Paint. For those who donated their time, talents and services, this phase of the project affirmed of the value of their contributions.

Boyle joined a session at the The Braille Institute in Los Angeles. Panels there had been treated with a textured paint so students could paint within the lines. "At the end, one little girl said it was the first time she'd painted anything," he recalls. "You hear that, and you realize what a special project you're involved with."

Bennett accompanied the Masseys to the critical burn unit at U.C. Irvine in Anaheim, where the patients in the children's ward were invited to fill in the designs. "It was incredible to see the therapeutic nature of this project. We watched as the faces on these children changed within minutes," he says. "Until I experienced that, I just didn't realize what meaningful stuff we were involved with."



More than 20,000 square feet of vinyl roof covering with the printed outlines of the designs were produced by Image Options using EFI/VUTEk printers. The outlines were later painted with colors by children and volunteers. (Photo courtesy of Image Options)



More objects than just lifeguard towers were wrapped for this project! (Photo courtesy of Project Hope)

That kind of reinforcement was repeated over and over, wherever volunteers added their brushstrokes to the designs. "When you see all these different people working elbow to elbow, for the common good and to beautify their surroundings, there's a real sense of accomplishment, for everyone involved," says Massey. "We're showing kids that if they work together they can do what seems unimaginable."

In early spring, the painted panels and vinyl started shipping for installation. Again, all work was done by volunteers, now supervised by Bonas. By May 1, all 157 lifeguard stations were decked out in bright new colors and designs for the 2010 beach season. At summers' end, panels are to be removed and sent to local hospitals and schools for display, and to Haiti for use in transitional homes. Summer of Color proved an instant hit, up and down the coast.

"It's really helped transform the beach and raise awareness of what Portraits of Hope is all about," says Massey. "People want to have their pictures taken in front of the lifeguard towers now, and are traveling the beach to see all the different designs."

He wants it known how much he appreciates the sign industry's many contributions: "They really helped make this project a success."