

Hermosa Beach News

Colorful lifeguard panels up for auction

by **Eric Michael Stitt**

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Those colorful fish- and flower-covered panels that brightened the beach's lifeguard towers last year will be up for grabs in a special auction to raise money for special charities.

Some 40 panels that lined Hermosa Beach as part of Portrait of Hope's Summer of Color project can be purchased for a minimum of \$250. But organizers are expecting some of the panels to bring in as much as \$1,000, considering the growing excitement from local residents who'd love to take home a piece of Hermosa history. The event will take place Feb. 11 from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Community Center in Room 7.

Resident and co-chair Diana Allen came up with the idea of holding the event when she was volunteering to paint the lifeguard tower panels back to their traditional blue. She learned that Portraits of Hope, the nonprofit organization aimed at enriching peoples' lives through art, was going to be sending the panels out across the world. The organization has shipped some to New Orleans and Haiti to brighten some of the areas that were devastated by natural disasters, Allen said.

Allen said she felt a connection with the panels and said they had quickly become a part of Hermosa Beach. She and Portraits of Hope agreed that 50 percent of the auction proceeds will go back to Portraits of Hope, while 30 percent will go to the Hermosa Beach Education Foundation and 20 percent will go to the Hermosa Beach Arts Foundation. Meanwhile, the Hermosa Beach Historical Society was given a few panels and View and Valley schools will receive 100 panels, which lined other Los Angeles County beaches, in order to create gigantic works of art, Allen said.

Allen and resident Janie Hindle, co-chair for the auction, are part of a small group of parents that will be hanging those 100 panels at both schools to create a "mosaic" style of artwork, Hindle said. During the fourth week of February, they'll hang panels along Valley's west-boundary fence about 25 feet in the air, measuring 8 feet high by 70 feet wide. They'll complete the one for View at a later date.

The auction event is free and open to the public. And complimentary beverages and snacks will be served throughout the silent auction, which stops at 8:30 p.m. Allen said they're hoping to create a party-type atmosphere where residents will eagerly await to find out if they've won their favorite panel.

"People have been so excited," Allen said. "The reception has been unbelievable. They're all hoping to get one."

Allen said she felt a silent auction was the only fair way to make the panels available, especially after people started begging her for some while she was unbolting them from the towers last fall.

About 15 Hermosa Beach businesses have helped get the word out by hanging some of the panels in their storefronts. Brittny Burford, owner of Paciugo Gelato, jumped at the opportunity to display some

of the unique artwork in her windows.

"I love to display anything to help support the community. People are really interested and want to go the event and bring home a piece of history," Burford said. Hindle said a lot of people thought the panels were a permanent part of the lifeguard towers and were going to be painted over with blue. But as the word has gotten out that the panels were removed and saved, she's been running into people who are hoping to get one from their own street or special beach spot.

"We want to give everyone the opportunity to bid and raise money for the three organizations," Hindle said.

Hindle said the panels measure either two by three, three by four or four by five feet and barely weigh an ounce.

Allen is thrilled at how everything has fallen into place and is thankful the auction is happening and that the panels will stay in Hermosa Beach. Allen said one summer to enjoy the panels just wasn't enough.

"I'd love to see these panels around the community," Allen said. "I'm so excited about what's going to happen, and I want them to live on forever in Hermosa."