

DAILY BREEZE

Kids turn lifeguard towers into art

By Josh Grossberg Staff Writer

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For a kid who's never even been to the beach before, Patrick Ransfer sure did his part to add a little pizzazz to the place.

Crouching over a plastic sheet Saturday morning, the 12-year-old Compton resident carefully applied fluorescent colors to something that soon will be spread across 30 miles of Los Angeles County coastline.

Ransfer was among hundreds of kids and adults taking part in an art project in Marina del Rey that will turn 150 iconic lifeguard towers into psychedelic artistic statements.

"It's fun to experience something you never did before," said the Davis Middle School student. "And of course, it's fun to paint."

The project was sponsored by Portraits of Hope, an organization with the simple goal of bringing art to the masses. Since brothers Ed and Bernie Massey started the program 10 years ago, Portraits of Hope has colorized towers, blimps and airplanes. The group even spruced up dozens of taxicabs in New York City with their distinctive loopy designs.

The work done Saturday won't be installed until May. But when it is, nobody who visits a beach from the Palos Verdes Peninsula to Zuma Beach will be able to miss it. The designs will remain all summer before they are taken down.

"We want to expose kids to large-scale civic projects," said a splotch-covered Ed Massey as he ran around coordinating things. "It's about teamwork. Kids will be part of something so iconic."

Massey credited people like county Supervisors Don Knabe and Zev Yaroslavsky, who both represent beach communities, for pushing the project along.

"Without them and the lifeguards, this wouldn't have happened," Massey said of the privately funded operation.

Also joining in the fun were the guys who will spend the summer explaining to tourists what the artwork is all about: county lifeguards.

"It's fantastic," said Hermosa Beach lifeguard Raymond Koehler.

His 7-year-old daughter, Savery, wound up with just about as much paint on her hands as she applied to panels.

"It's really fun," said the Riviera Elementary School student. "And it makes me feel cool."

Portraits of Hope began as a way to provide creative therapy for kids in hospitals. But it has since been expanded to include just about anyone, no matter what their inspiration is.

"It's just good to get out of the house," said 15-year-old Compton resident Edward Nolan.

The kids from Compton came by bus along with some of their teachers.

"Some of our kids will never get to the beach," said Assistant Principal Cynthia Wright. "For them, this is the chance of a lifetime."

Although most people won't see them, even the roofs of the stations will be covered with swirls of paint. But lifeguard Frank Bird was even excited about that.

"Imagine being on a plane over Dockweiler Beach and seeing this," he said.

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