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# THE TRIBUNE

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SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

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## Ill children across California paint panels for a huge monument going up in Los Angeles County



Cody Nunez, 7, right, and Katie Skiff, 4, left, paint a part of Portraits of Hope on Monday at French Hospital Medical Center. Next to Katie is Ed Massey. Behind Cody is Catherine Abenido, whose daughter Jayme Bish, 3, also works on the project.

TRIBUNE PHOTO BY JAYSON MELLOW

## Building hope — 165 feet of it

PORTRAITS PROJECT IS  
CREATIVE THERAPY FOR  
MANY IN HOSPITALS

SAN LUIS OBISPO

By CAROL ROBERTS  
THE TRIBUNE

Seven-year-old Kelsey Koehler of Paso Robles was on her hands and knees Monday afternoon, having the time of her life at Sierra Vista Regional Center.

Instead of merely undergoing chemotherapy for a brain tumor, Koehler smiled and chatted with half a dozen youngsters and their parents as she carefully painted between the lines on a huge canvas spread across the auditorium floor. Her 3-year-old brother Chase joined

along.

The two youngsters' brush strokes brightened a part of what will be the largest monument in the West, according to a press release.

The Sierra Vista participants and about a dozen more at French Hospital Medical Center are among 4,000 young hospital patients statewide who are taking part in Project 9865, also called Portraits in Hope. Participants are painting floral panels, which will cover an old 165-foot oil tower that stands at 9865 Olympic Blvd., one of the busiest thoroughfares in Los Angeles and the gateway to Beverly Hills.

The tower, according to a press release, is 13 feet taller than the Statue of Liberty and has three times the painting surface area of the Sistine Chapel ceiling.

"This is wonderful," Koehler's mother, Linda, said of the project. "It puts a fun as-

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TRIBUNE PHOTO BY DAVID MIDDLECAMP

Alanna Cooperman, 7, paints a flower Monday at Sierra Vista Medical Center. Next to her is twin sister Arielle. Ed Massey, left, and Bernie Massey are co-founders of the project.

## Hope

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pect on coming to the hospital."

The project, which has been in the works for the past five years, is the brainchild of Ed and Bernie Massey of Los Angeles.

So far, it's involved about 40,000 volunteers.

A first of its kind, said Ed Massey, it has the blessing of the Beverly Hills and Los Angeles city councils and is chaired by former Gov. Pete Wilson and Senators Diane Feinstein and Barbara Boxer.

Healthy school children throughout the state painted three coats of base background on 100 panels for the flowers. Children in camps, youth clubs and other programs will continue to do that this summer, the men said.

The Massey brothers got the idea while reading one of artist and children's author Ed Massey's books to kids in Los Angeles hospitals. The children, they said, needed some creative therapy. Their resulting project now falls under the Center for American Studies and Culture, which is directed by Bernie Massey, 40.

As they tour hospitals in the state, Ed Massey, 36, said children who are too sick to assemble get bedside visits and are given smaller parts of the project to paint. There also are extended paint brushes for kids in wheelchairs.

The project builds self-esteem, he said, and those working on a big section spread out on the floor "get a chance to move around, get loose."

Seven-year-old Arielle Cooperman, of Templeton, who's been in and out of the hospital over the past two years with leukemia, happily painted alongside her healthy twin sister, Alana.

"It's a wonderful way to get these kids' minds off what they're going through," Ed Massey said of all the young artists.

## Facts about Portraits in Hope

**What:** Part of a creative therapy program, the project is aimed at enhancing the quality of life for hospitalized children and seniors at adult day care centers.

**Who:** More than 4,000 hospitalized children in conjunction with more than 40,000 volunteers are creating the monument.

**Participating institutions:** Hundreds of California institutions are participating, including hospitals, oncology and AIDS camps, schools, youth organizations, churches and synagogues.

**Where:** The painted 165-foot-tall tower will be located at the gateway to Beverly Hills on one of the busiest thoroughfares in Los Angeles at 9865 Olympic Blvd.

**Donations:** Anyone interested in donating to the nonprofit effort can write: Project 9865, 2118 Wilshire Blvd. No. 527, Santa Monica, 90403.

**Sponsors:** The tower project is financed entirely by donations from individuals, foundations and corporate sponsorships. Sponsors include NIKE, Mattel, Sony Music and Dinwiddie Construction, the builders of the Getty Center.

The tower, he predicted, "will be really awesome," something the kids will be proud they were part of. All of their names will be at its base.