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## Summer blooms visit Loma Linda University Children's Hospital

January 19 brought something unexpected to Loma Linda University Children's Hospital. Instead of the winter rains, summer flowers unfurled their vibrant petals at the hands of young patients-turned-artists.

Every patient at the hospital who was feeling good enough to participate painted at least a petal or leaf of a large floral mural laid out on the floor of room 1830 in the Children's Hospital. The mural was part of a creative therapy program for hospitalized children called Project 9865.

The project will recruit patients from every pediatric unit in California to paint floral panels which will eventually transform a dilapidated Beverly Hills oil tower into a work of art. Each of the tower's sides will represent one of the four seasons. (L.L.U.C.H. patients painted the largest panel of the summer season.) At 155 feet high, the tower is three feet taller than the Statue of Liberty. When completed, it will be the largest monument in the western United States.

Whether they were in wheelchairs or pulling IV poles behind them, none of these young patients were left out. In fact, IV poles and wheelchairs alike rolled quite nicely onto the large floral mural. For those who couldn't get down on the floor to paint, there were paint brushes on three-foot-long poles and even special shoes with paint sponges attached to the soles.

Watching her son paint from his wheelchair, Mrs. Wagoner could hardly contain her enthusiasm.

"It's really wonderful to see him getting involved," she said, "and that they have these things for the kids to do instead of sitting in their rooms all day looking out the window or watching TV."

Project 9865 began as the dream of Southern California artist Ed Massey, who for some time had

been searching for ways to renovate the failing oil tower. Also a children's book author, he learned about creative therapy while reading to hospitalized children.

One day, as he jogged past the oil tower, everything fell into place.

"I thought if this was painted on the ground we could bring panels to any area and have anyone paint it. And how incredible it would be as a vehicle for creative therapy for children who wouldn't have access to a mural of this nature or this magnitude," he says.

According to Ed Massey's brother Bernie Massey, director for the Center for American Studies and Culture, the umbrella organization for Project 9865, the goal of the project is to give children a chance to get their minds off their illnesses and achieve the spectacular.

"Ultimately, the whole concept is children who are often battling for their own lives are giving life back to something," Bernie Massey says.

By the time the project is

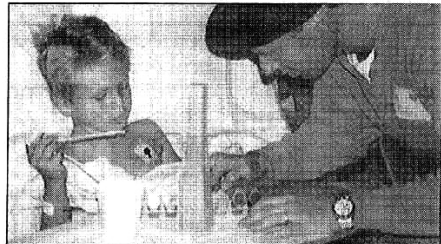
finished early next year, 35,000 school children will have painted base coats on the murals and 4,000 hospitalized children will have painted the flowers and leaves.

The tower, which will feature the name of each child who participated in the project, is located at 9865 Olympic Boulevard, where 25 million cars drive by every year.

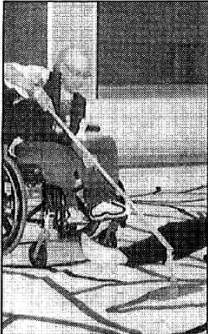
"Our whole goal is when people drive by this tower, [it will inspire them to] get involved on some level either with kids who are ill or help out in terms of research...or volunteering," Bernie says. "But ultimately when someone drives by they're going to remember that there's [a child] in a hospital that people oftentimes don't think about unless they're personally affected by it."



With the help of a volunteer, Leah Wagner, 17, paints a white petal. She found it refreshing to just be a kid again.



Ed Massey, director of Project 9865, tells patient Aaron Grovum, 7, how to make different colors by mixing paints.



Justin Wagoner, 16, is so involved in painting this flower petal that he doesn't even hear his mother ask him if he's having fun.



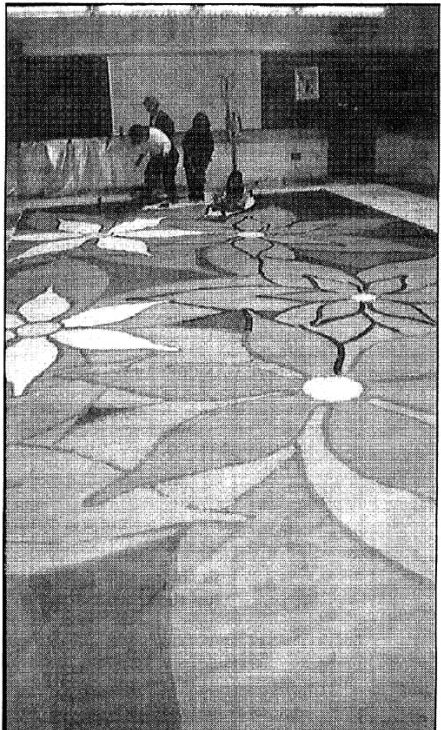
Taking a break from painting is inevitable when a Loma Linda University Medical Center volunteer shows this gorilla to 7-month-old Dimitri Galloway, Jr., who is in the hospital following esophagus surgery.



Honami Yamakida, 5, who received a heart transplant at LLUHC in July, perches on a foam pad as she works to fill in her leaf with dark green paint.



Complete with bubbly personality and ready smile, Aubree Wallis, 6, throws herself wholeheartedly into painting this apple-green leaf. Here with her mother Linda Wallis and a Project 9865 volunteer, Aubree was treated for a brain tumor and is now cancer-free.



By late afternoon, the mural is nearly completed. Eleven-year-old Lucia Echeverria works with several volunteers to finish the last two leaves.