

## PETALS PAY OFF IN SMILES

Painting project gives  
young hospital patients  
in Fresno and Lindsay  
a little artistic  
diversion.

BY MATTHAI CHAKKO  
KURUVILA

THE FRESNO BEE

There's a 165-foot-tall oil rig standing in the middle of west Los Angeles. It was wrapped in polyvinyl fabric many years ago to give it more style than its bare skeleton would. And while it sits next to a major thoroughfare, no one really sees it.

"Most people drive by either ignoring it or see it as an ugly structure," Ed Massey said Wednesday during a stopover at Valley Children's Hospital.

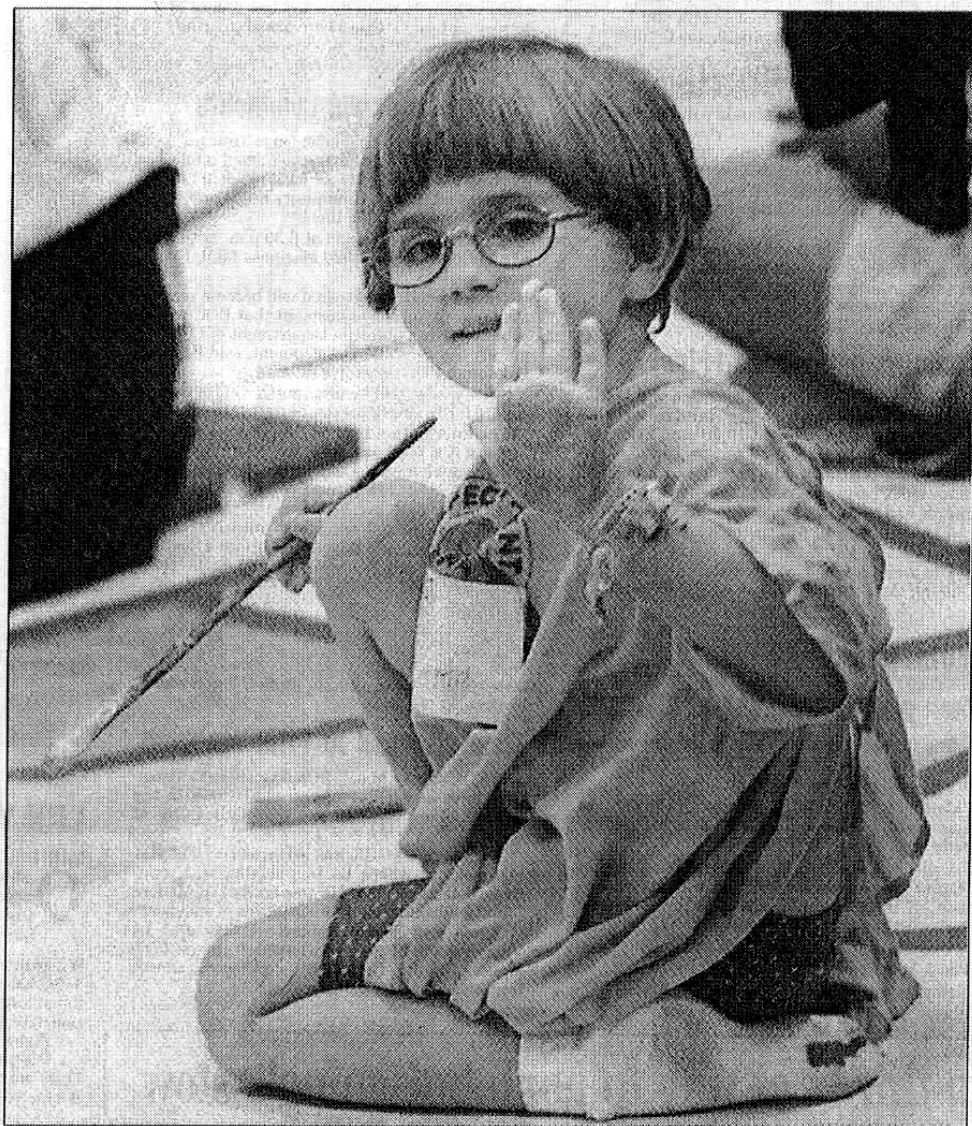
So, it made perfect sense to Massey and his brother that it would come to symbolize the plight of hospitalized children: a monolith in the midst of masses, forgotten.

Massey, 36, and his brother, Bernie, 40, have decided to dress the tower in polyvinyl again, then cover it with flower paintings drawn by children like those in Valley Children's and Lindsay District hospitals. The Masseys hope that the process, named Project 9865, will bring life to children trapped in hospitals throughout California and bring a message that these children can still participate in the community.

"This gives us a chance to bring some childhood into the hospital and to help them get their minds off their illnesses," Ed Massey said. "I very much enjoy trying to bring out issues that many people may not think about."

Twenty patients at Valley Children's and at Lindsay District worked with the Los Angeles-based nonprofit organization Wednesday painting two of 100 panels that will cover the tower.

Nine fifth- and sixth-graders from Pinedale Elementary also came to help the patients. The massive pan-



Samantha Twidt, 5, of Fresno does her share of the painting duties Wednesday at Valley Children's Hospital.

els were spread over floors in the two hospitals as children crawled over them, filling in paint by themselves and with the help of volunteers.

At the Lindsay hospital, eight children completed more than a third of one of the 7-by-30-foot panels in three hours. The 12 young patients at Valley Children's completed the rest of that panel and one more in the afternoon.

"It's going to go up on a big wall," said an excited David Thaxachay, 11. The young Clovis resident

Painted yellow flower petals from his chair. He plans on seeing it when it's done, "if I can get there."

The Masseys also have developed tools for children who can't paint on the floor. Reginal Webster, 12, of Bakersfield painted from his wheelchair using a long extension rod that had a brush affixed to its end. "It's kind of fun," he said. Reginal had been passing the time by watching TV until Project 9865 came along.

Project 9865, so named because it is at 9865 Olympic Blvd. in Los Angeles, has visited nearly 2,500 chil-

dren in hospitals over the past 4½ years.

"The goal of [projects like this] is to let kids be kids," said Scott Rigby, 37, Valley Children's full-time schoolteacher. "When you're in a hospital, you don't think about a giant painting."

Christy Walker, 16, of Fresno is hospitalized every other month for a week at a time due to her asthma, but she has kept her positive attitude. "It's another place to call home," she said of the hospital. "You always have new people to meet."