

Schools



Second-graders at Woodside Elementary School decorate get-well cards for hospitalized children, who will paint floral murals to cover an old oil rig in Century City.

For and by the children

Woodside students contribute to art monument for kids

By KATE DALY

Art by assembly line. That's how the organizers of a large-scale mural project succeeded in getting several hundred Woodside Elementary students to paint two large canvases in one school day recently.

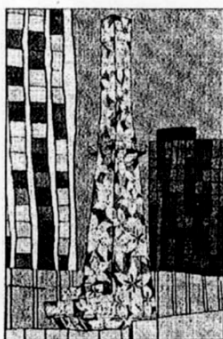
The canvases will serve as backdrops for floral murals to be painted by hospitalized children. The murals are among many that will be sewn onto fiberglass panels and used to cover an old oil rig that now stands as an eyesore among skyscrapers at the Beverly Hills/Century City border.

The tower of art will be a monument to the spirit of children, said Bernie Massey of the Center for American Studies and Culture in Santa Monica. His brother Ed, an artist who is also based in the Los Angeles area, came up with the idea a few years ago.

Carrying a four seasons motif, the tower of art will stand taller than the Statue of Liberty and will symbolize "giving life back," said Mr. Massey.

The project has mobilized thousands of volunteers all over the state to provide creative therapy for an estimated 4,000 kids in hospitals and illness-related camps.

So far, Mr. Massey estimated, about 13,000 school children and adult volunteers have helped with the preparation phase. This entails taking a room-sized canvas to various campuses, and having students roll on several thin coats of paint.



This illustration shows how an old oil rig in Century City will be transformed into a monument to the spirit of hospitalized children, who will paint floral murals covering the 15,000-square-foot rig

On February 26, all Woodside students in grades 2 through 8 grabbed a roller to cover their two canvases in yellow, white, and green paint. They also spent some time quietly, drawing get-well cards for the patients who would be receiving the canvases.

As volunteers guided them through the process, second-grader Jordan Fox walked onto a canvas in his socks, pressed down on a paint roller and exclaimed, "This is awesome!"

The students were primed with a videotape and brief presentation

on the project, and seemed eager to get to the head of the line to try out their painting techniques. Students also said they enjoyed making the cards for children suffering from cancer, AIDS, and other serious ailments.

Fifth-grader Alyssa Long personalized her card by drawing a globe and writing, "You make the world go round."

Afterward, the canvases and cards were driven to local Kaiser facilities, where pediatric patients painted flowers and leaves measuring up to 25 feet in length on the giant canvases.

If a child is bedridden, smaller canvases are brought to his hospital bed. If he can't use his hands, custom-made painting shoes are available. Mr. Massey said he's seen times when "kids who haven't had any movement actually move, and they use the painting as therapy."

Mr. Massey expects to complete all the painting over the next several months. DinWiddie Construction of San Francisco has offered to install the panels pro bono, and that could take another two months.

Eventually, 25 million motorists will pass the monument at 9865 Olympic Boulevard each year. A plaque will list everyone who helped, naming schools and patients who participated.

Once the monument is done, Mr. Massey said, he plans to look for other locations for similar projects outside of California, perhaps geared toward senior citizens the next time around.