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PAINTING WAY TO SELF-ESTEEM



LARRY ROSE/For the Sun

ABOVE: Lupe Palei, 13, left, paints with some help from Paula Murphy at Loma Linda University Children's Hospital. The floral panel project will cover a 155-foot-high tower in Beverly Hills. **BELOW:** Sandy Gooen, left, works on the state-wide project, Portraits of Hope, with Chante Johnson and 7-month-old Dimitri Gallow Jr.

Patients creating state monument

By MICHEL NOLAN
San Bernardino County Sun

LOMA LINDA — Hope came in many colors Tuesday — brushed across a huge canvas in bold strokes of orange, blue, yellow and green by young patients-turned-artists at Loma Linda University Children's Hospital.

Even those who use wheelchairs found a way to paint — their brushes attached to 3-foot-long poles — as they joined in creating the largest monument in the Western United States.

"It makes me feel like I've done something important," said Lupe Palei, 13, of Ontario, a wheelchair-using artist who is being treated in the oncology unit.

Although Lupe reached out with her extended brush to painstakingly paint green leaves on the 14-foot-by-20-foot polyvinyl canvas, she said her arms were not tired.

As part of the creative therapy program, Project 9865, Loma Linda's young patients painted a floral panel that will be placed on a 155-foot-high oil tower at 9865 Olympic Blvd. in Beverly Hills.

When the panels are completed, 4,000 children from throughout California will have painted 15,000 square feet of panels to cover a tower that is three feet taller than the Statue of Liberty and has three times the painting area of the Sistine Chapel.

"I think it looks 'mahvelous dahling,'" said 6-year-old Aubree Wallis, of Victorville, who painted both leaves and flowers. Aubree, who has had surgery and proton radiation treatment for a brain tumor, is now cancer-free, said Linda Wallis, her mother.

Seven-month-old Dimitri Gallow Jr., who is recovering from esophagus surgery, had telltale traces of apple-green paint on the bottoms of his feet as he sat in his mother's lap.

"He actually held a paintbrush — with a little help," said his mother, Chante Johnson of Moreno Valley. "They tell me Dimitri is the youngest artist so far to do any painting."

While each of the tower's sides will represent one of the four seasons, Loma Linda children are working on the largest panel of the summer season, said Susan Nassberg, spokesperson for the project.

Project 9865 is the cornerstone of the Portraits of Hope program, a nonprofit creative therapy program aimed at enhancing the quality of life for hospitalized children and seniors at adult-care centers.

"The mission of the project is to bring joy and instill pride in those who are often isolated from and forgotten by others," said Nassberg.

The brainchild of Los Angeles-area artist and author Ed Massey, the state-wide project is involving thousands



of children coping with cancer, AIDS and other illnesses to paint panels that will be installed on the tower next September.

"This project lets kids experience being a kid again. It brings childhood into the hospital," said Bernie Massey, who works on the project with his brother and serves as director for the Center for American Studies and Culture.

"It gives kids who can't

ride bikes, fly kites or run on the playground an experience they can share with their parents and siblings. This will give them a spectacular sense of accomplishment."

The mural tower will be a high-profile project, with 20 to 25 million cars driving by it annually.

A plaque with the names of all of the young patients will be placed on the monument. Massey estimates the artwork will last about 20 years.