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Beverly Hills

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Olympic Oil Tower Gets Makeover

■ **Project 9865** nears completion.

By Meghan Ward

Beverly Hills is the stomping ground for many creative and talented individuals whose legacy will be remembered for years to come.

Early next year, 4,000 children will be added to that list as Project 9865 nears completion.

Named for the address of an unsightly oil tower on Olympic Boulevard, the project was conceived by Ed and Bernie Massey, brothers in blood and in vocation.

Ed is the artist and Bernie the businessperson behind Project 9865, which began in 1995 after the publication of Milton, a children's book written by Ed.

"We were invited to give readings inside of hospitals," Bernie said. "Then we learned that the panels [of the tower] are removable and have to be painted on the ground."

The Masseys decided to combine their skills to create a 165-foot monument painted entirely by sick children

around the state—from Eureka to the Mexican border and from the west coast inland.

"Sometimes we'll go to hospitals where there's just one kid—as long as there's one, we'll go," Ed Massey said. There is not a day that goes by that the Masseys and their entourage of volunteers are not busy at work. From meetings with school boards and architectural commissions to caravanning their entire studio to hospitals, the Masseys have spent the last four-and-a-half years of their lives dedicated to Project 9865.

The panels, ranging in size from 15 feet by 7 feet to 40 feet by 16 feet, are composed of a heavy vinyl skin and two pieces of insulation. School children around California paint each vinyl canvas with three coats of white base paint. Ed Massey, with the aid of volunteers, then stencils flowers onto the canvases before they are sent to hospitals and camps where sick children use specially designed paintbrushes to add color to the flowers.

Eight-foot long extensions and special shoe brushes enable children who are in wheelchairs, missing limbs or whose hands are not fully functional, to paint like any other child.

"We've had children with paintbrushes in their mouths, just out of surgery," Ed said.

"We've had children who can't see and who paint," Bernie added.

The therapeutic benefits for the children are numerous. Not only does participation in the project provide children with an interactive activity that is fun, it boosts their self-esteem and gives them something to look forward to.

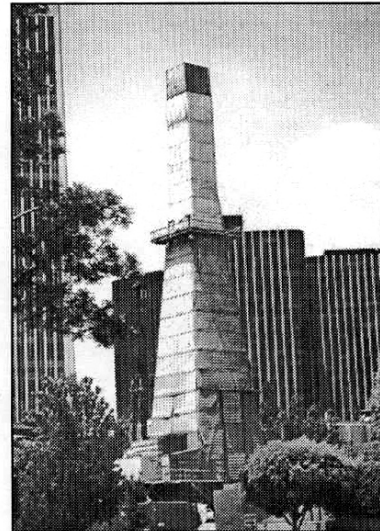
"They get so excited to know that the whole world is going to see their work," Phyllis Anne Copeland, television producer and cancer survivor, said. "It brings them such hope and happiness. It's not like they draw a picture and hang it up on the refrigerator."

Darian Blecher, another volunteer, suffered from cancer in her early twenties. "It's amazing to see in action and it's great for the kids. Their day-to-day existence is so 360 from those who go to school and can be with their parents at home, but something like this goes beyond the realm of what most healthy kids can experience - not many kids get to take part in a monument."

The tower, which is 13 feet taller than the Statue of Liberty and has three times the surface area of the ceiling of the Cistine Chapel, will be viewed by the 25 billion cars that drive by the tower each year. It will also be the tallest monument in the western United States.

The children, who suffer from everything from burn trauma to leukemia, brain tumors and HIV, spend from two to five hours painting the canvas and wooden replicas of the tower which are included in a gift bag provided by the project.

"Often kids who can't ride a bike or play ball can do better than an 8-by-11 with crayons," Bernie Massey said. "A lot of people didn't think hospitalized kids could come paint this. Once it's up, people are going to be truly shocked at the accomplishments of the kids."



The oil tower at 9865 Olympic Blvd.

Once the project is completed, the Masseys plan to look for another structure in need of rehabilitation. "They have to be in high-profile locations so the kids know people will see it," Bernie added.

Anyone interested in participating in the project or making a donation please contact:

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A child helps create the art for Project 9865.