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## Pediatric patients help build monument

*Large project designed to help self-esteem*

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WATSONVILLE — Pediatric children in Watsonville will take part in a statewide program that will bolster their self-esteem and therapeutic needs, as well as permanently place their niche on the largest monument in the western United States.

"This has been the most uplifting project I've ever been involved

in," said project founder Ed Massey. "Anything we can give these kids and families, we get back tenfold."

As part of the program, called Project 9865, pediatric kids who face daily challenges of pain, isolation and fear are given an exciting and therapeutic creative outlet. Over the course of a year, thousands of children battling cancer, AIDS, and other illnesses will transform a 15,000 square foot tower into the largest monument in the Western United States and involves children from every pediatric unit in the state of California as part of a larger creative therapy

program called Portraits of Hope.

The patients will join in the creation of the monument by painting individual floral panels which will cover a 165 foot-tall tower in Beverly Hills, and the tower's sides will then represent one of the four seasons as a tribute to the spirit, will and legacy of these children who suffer from illness.

"When these kids are painting, it's like an art class," Massey said. "And the only problem is, they don't want to stop painting."

Amazingly, the tower will stand a staggering 13 feet taller than the

See MONUMENT, page 8

## MONUMENT

From page 1

Statue of Liberty and covers three times the painting area of the Sistine Chapel ceiling.

The pediatric patients of Watsonville Community Hospital and their families will all take their place in history as they help paint and create some of those panels, Massey said.

Before the hospitalized kids even see the panels, thousands of healthy children that represent California's ethnic and cultural diversity from various schools, scout organizations, children's museums and boys and girls clubs have already painted the base coats on the 100 panels sent to the hundreds of pediatric care centers and oncology camps in Watsonville and across California. The panel will form the monument's outer wall. As this part of the phase continues, the kids will not only

work together, but learn about each other through special cultural exhibits created by them and partnering institutions.

As the hospitalized children paint the floral designs, they begin to engage in festive family activity within the confines of the hospital and experience precious time together with their families to focus on something other than their illness.

"It's such a great time for families to really share something with their kids," said Susan Nassberg for the Project. "To see these kids smile is wonderful."

Massey explained that even children with no limbs, or severe handicaps, can get involved in painting with very special tools and brushes.

"Many of the kids aren't in the best of spirits when they start, but to see their faces when there're finished is such an accomplishment," said Massey.

A prepared statement for the Project of Hope said that in this way, Project 9865 will serve in the vanguard of promoting cross-cultural understanding and ethnic tolerance in young children. The Project will also serve as a benefit to heighten self-esteem for the children's credible achievement.

Thousands of people from all walks-of-life, and seniors in particular, will volunteer on behalf of the children and play a role in assisting them.

For the seniors, Project of Hope serves to better their quality of life by allowing them to participate in the program and engage in creative activities that focus on beautifying and transforming their own living environments. They become involved in the creation of the large-scale mural, and other works of art, joining in collaborative efforts with their families, volunteers and the children.

Strassberg said Project 9865 was created four years ago by Massey, an artist and author, and his brother Bernie Massey, Director of the

Center for American Studies and Culture. Portraits of Hope is aimed at enhancing the quality of life for hospitalized children and seniors at adult care centers. By raising the public consciousness to the conditions of both populations, the mission of the Program brings joy and instills pride in these two segments of the population, which they feel are often isolated from and forgotten by others.

The project has already been to several other hospitals in the area, including Community Hospital of Monterey Peninsula, Dominican Hospital of Santa Cruz and Natividad Hospital in Salinas. Overall, the project will involve over 4,000 kids from California.

It is a major goal that all projects under Portraits of Hope focus on unifying families, communities, ethnicities, and generations and to integrate Healthcare, the Arts and Cross Cultural Inter-Generational Cooperation.

The program is funded solely from individual and foundation donations and corporate sponsor-

ships. Every penny serves the program and patients. A few of the current sponsors include international labels Nike, Mattel Toys, Penske Automotive and Sony Music.

The children of Watsonville Hos-

pital will assist the Program on Thursday between 2 and 3 p.m. at the hospital at 75 Nielson Street.

"It's amazing," said Strassberg. "There making history, all while feeling special in a positive way."