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Turlock hospital kids help with 165-foot art project

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TURLOCK — Children at Emanuel Medical Center will have their art talents tower over Beverly Hills on an abandoned oil derrick taller than the Statue of Liberty.

The art project, which is roaming from hospital to hospital up and down California, will be at Emanuel from 11:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. today.

"They contacted all the hospitals in the area, but we are the first hospital in Stanislaus County that's doing this," said Pennie Rorex, spokeswoman for Emanuel.

The art the children in the Emanuel Medical Center pediatrics ward paint will be added to an 11,000-square-foot mural named "Portraits of Hope: Project 9865."

"They will show up an hour early and set up the easels and panel," Rorex said. "Then they have these special brushes so every child, regardless of their illness, will be able to work on it."

For example, she said, a child using a wheelchair would be given a brush with a long stem.

"When we bring those out, everyone wants to paint," said Ed

Massey, the Los Angeles-based children's author who came up with the idea for the mural. "We've seen children who can't hold on to brushes, so we designed a foot brush and asked Nike to help. They donated these shoes that look like those sneakers all the kids are wearing."

Massey is the director of Portraits of Hope, a nonprofit organization that brings creative art programs to disabled and ill people who normally wouldn't have a chance to do art on their own. He came up with the idea for the mural after realizing that the abandoned 165-foot-tall derrick, at 9865 Olympic Blvd., had removable panels on it.

"I saw the tower go up over 20 years ago," Massey said. "The exterior has become weathered since then."

The 100 panels range in size from 13 feet across and 7 feet high, to 40 feet across and 20 feet high. Fortunately, they can be rolled and easily transported, Massey said. Once finished, the mural will represent the four seasons. The children at Emanuel will be painting panel 17, part of the spring side of the painting.

"It's one of the most promi-

ART: Kids statewide taking part

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nent panels in the project," Massey said.

Every child who participates will get his or her name on a permanent plaque on the tower, a hat, a small wooden replica of the project, paint brushes and paints.

To date, more than 75 hospitals in California have participated in Project 9865. Children in Stockton painted panels Thursday.

Once the painting is finished, some time this year, each panel will be mounted to fiberglass squares and then coated with a protective finish. Early next year, cranes will be used to put the panels in place.

"The tower is in one of the most prominent places in one of the most well-known cities in the world," Massey said. "It's the first thing you see when you enter Beverly Hills, or the last thing when you leave, depending on which direction you are headed."

More information about the project can be found on the Internet at <http://www.project9865.org>

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