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THE BEST OF SO CAL

Features

So So Cal

THE BEST...THE BEAUTIFUL...AND THE BIZARRE

A Well That Springs Hope

TOWERING PEAT

The thousands of daily motorists on Olympic Boulevard who've long since ceased to notice that oil rig at the tail end of Beverly Hills are soon in for a surprise. Through the determination of seriously ill children in pediatric hospitals and oncology camps from north of Eureka all the way to the Mexican border, the oil rig, tucked into the shadows of Century City's smogscrapers, is about to come into bloom.

"Project 9865," titled simply enough for its street address, will allow hospitalized children and their families the opportunity to contribute to a lasting memorial, due for completion next May. It is the cornerstone project of Portraits of Hope—the philanthrop-

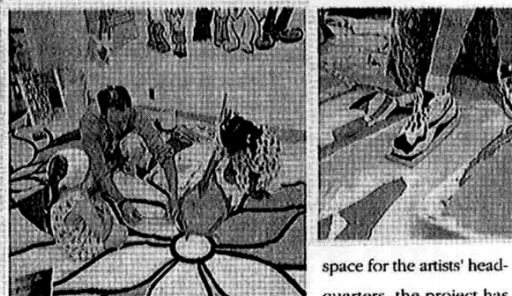


Brothers Ed and Bernie Massey work with artists such as Marquita, top right, as they paint panels that will cover a Beverly Hills oil rig, lower left.

ic brainchild of local artist Ed Massey, who's working on it with his brother Bernie. In bringing the massive undertaking to fruition, thousands of kids coping with cancer, AIDS and other illnesses will paint individual portable panels; the 155-foot-tall tower (three feet taller than the Statue of Liberty and with three times the painting area of the Sistine Chapel ceiling) will then be covered with the completed floral panels, with each of the structure's four sides representing the seasons.

"We're going to bring attention not only to the cause of these children who are participating but also we're putting flowers in a place where flowers would never exist," says Ed Massey. "For children battling for their lives, giving life back to a structure is a wonderful concept."

Garnering sponsorship from individuals and corporations such as Nike, which donated sneakers to convert into "shoe paintbrushes" for children who no longer can use their arms, and the Westside Pavilion, which ponied up the 4,000 square feet of critically needed ground-floor work



space for the artists' headquarters, the project has

even been adopted by none other than model Angie Everhart, who named it her charity during an appearance on celebrity "Wheel of Fortune."

But the project isn't all about scrounging for funds and soliciting donations. "A 5-year-old girl who had just undergone brain surgery and couldn't see out of one eye was able to delay her MRI an entire day while she 'shoe-danced,' painting leaves for hours," Massey recalls.

"A lot of these children are too young to know what's really wrong with them or why they have to be confined to hospitals," he says. "We're the only adults these kids see all day who haven't come to poke or pinch them. We bring the playground to them and let them have fun." That, perhaps, is the most wonderful aspect of the entire project: allowing children with far too weighty concerns on their young minds the chance to escape their problems, and be children again.

—A. Grey Le Cuyer