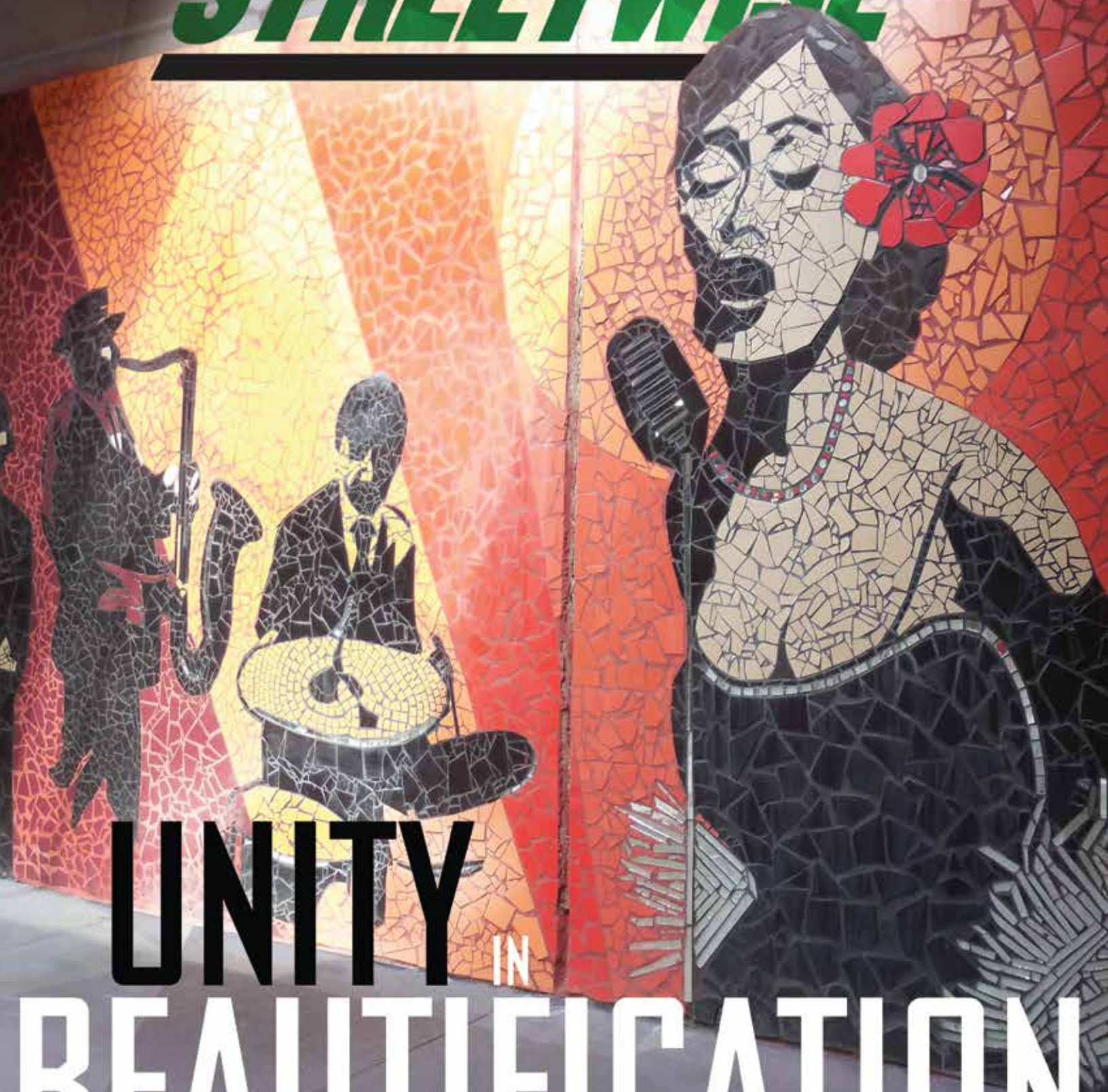


STREETWISE



UNITY

IN

BEAUTIFICATION



Katrina Wadlington attended the September 24 ribbon cutting for a new Woodlawn mural because she wanted to say “thank you.”

The new, 1,700-foot mural on the Metra underpass at East Marquette and South Dorchester is “just beautiful, it gives families hope and inspiration,” Wadlington said. She had driven through the viaduct to and from her job as a staff nurse at LaRabida Children’s Hospital all summer as the mural was being created.

“There’s music,” she said of the images on the wall. “There’s children. There’s friends. Black culture. Different cultures. It makes the world come together more. We have enough violence. It’s definitely not something we want to showcase. We need to show people the beauty of Chicago. We need positive energy.”

Seneka Hunley and his nephew passed the mural every time they went to the store. Both of them liked the Metra

cause gangs would respect the mural. “I’m pretty sure a couple of gang members know how to draw and they might be interested in it.”

Ald Willie B. Cochran (20th ward) and the Green Star Movement, a not-for-profit whose mission is to revitalize neighborhoods and build communities through public art, developed the mural. Jordan Taggart, project manager with the Green Star Movement, said that Ald. Cochran and community members wanted to concentrate on the positive “for a community that just needed a little boost.”

“We had a saying: ‘if you’re having a bad day at work, come and work with us for a few hours.’”

As soon as artists started marking the design on the wall in early June, community members drove through the underpass and honked their approval, Taggart said. Still other people brought water, food and snacks to the more

beautifying the viaducts. Especially after Ald. Leslie Hairston (5th ward) facilitated a mural across the street, he decided, “it was my responsibility to do this.”

After getting permission from Metra, “I wanted to bring in the positive things that were happening here: the rich history and the [Dorchester] Botanical Gardens.” Community members created two designs for Green Star Movement and the final product used elements from both.

Located on the west side of the Metra tracks, the Dorchester Botanical Gardens start at 64th Street. Assisted by grants from the University of Chicago, artist William Hill removed broken glass, then mixed found objects and plants in a block-long trail to teach young people the relationship between people, plants and animals. The alderman also pointed to historic photos of the 63rd/Cottage environs on the wall: the now-demolished Tivoli

are at right now and we want to continue that rebirth.”

After the mural ribbon-cutting, Cochran invited community members to tour a model home across the street, one of up to 150 he projects for the neighborhood over the next seven to eight years. He also foresees condominiums and luxury apartments.

Extending the Dorchester Botanical Gardens another block to Marquette and the new mural is another goal. He plans similar projects at other viaducts on 63rd Street, along with Welcome to Woodlawn signs on both 63rd and Marquette Streets.

Murals are not generally used to gentrify neighborhoods although recently planners and neighborhood organizers have realized that the medium can be used to engage the community about how to transform neighborhoods, says Jon Pounds, executive director emeritus of Chicago Public Art

MURALS PROVIDE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

by Suzanne Hanney

Electric train depicted in mosaic and mirrors, the kids on bikes, butterflies, flowers, jazz artists and historic community photo transfers, such as the Columbian Exposition of 1893 and Muhammad Ali walking down 63rd Street.

While Chicago violence may be all over the news, Hunley was glad the mural did not deliver that message. “You need to walk on these streets safe, you need to go on that train safe, you need to ride bikes safe, we need a rose in our life to give to our woman or our daughter. Everything is positive. You don’t need no guns on this mural, hell no.”

Hunley said he considered the underpass a safe zone be-

than 200 volunteers who filled in the design until the beginning of September.

Interns from Cochran’s office, community members, high school students on mission from Texas and Arkansas and corporate volunteers on team-building outings shared the 35-hour a week schedule. Cochran himself did the mosaics for a red cardinal on a Metra electric overhead pole because, he said, it’s Illinois’s state bird and attractive to young people.

Cochran and Green Star Movement had earlier collaborated on a mural in another part of his ward and people had long talked to him about

movie palace; the Grand Ballroom that he said hosted Count Basie, Billie Holiday, Louis Armstrong and Miles Davis; smaller clubs like Herman Roberts’ 500 Room; and the Strand Hotel, which has recently undergone a \$28 million renovation into first floor commercial space and apartments for singles earning less than \$32,000 annually or couples earning \$36,500. The top rent is \$725 for a one-bedroom, Cochran said.

Yes, the alderman said he is hoping to create an “environment of entertainment – not only jazz but spoken word, a place to come to. We’ve been working on the community for years, gotten it to the place we

Group (CPAG). “It’s something we used to count on churches to do but we don’t go to church as often as we use to do so we don’t have as many places where people can gather, talk about social and spiritual conditions, and what to do about them.”

Chicago gave the world the first outdoor mural, the Wall of Respect, painted in 1967 on an empty (and now demolished) building at 43rd and Langley. Although the inspiration was Diego Rivera and other Latin American muralists, the driving factor was “the perceived need to have a representation of African American culture that was fairer and more balanced.

“There was virtually no precedent for it. Male and female artists of many disciplines were determined to make an alternative vision of African-American culture for African-American people,” Pounds said. Although done with the permission of the wall owner, these murals were basically self-funded.

The mural movement spread first to Hyde Park as a celebration of diversity and then all over South and West Side black and Latino neighborhoods, Pounds said. Artists were either from the community or respectful of its issues, whether drug use, police brutality or gentrification.

More recently, the movement has evolved to all other parts of the city, such as Lakeview and Rogers Park. The newest generation of artists feels more committed to urban life than to ethnicity.

Pounds said that underpasses tend to be the prevailing backdrop because of Chicago’s railroad history. A century ago, street-level railroad crossings meant that people were getting killed as they tried to cross multiple tracks while carrying children or packages. The City mandated that railroads raise their tracks, and the result was more than 600 underpasses.

The best murals, Pounds says, are like news media that speak to challenging conditions. He points to “Tilt” (Together Protect the Community) at Fullerton and Washtenaw by John Pitman Weber. Weber co-founded CPAG with William Walker (who initiated the idea for the Wall of Respect). Tilt presents two faces: one closer to passersby that shows the community taking care of itself and another more tucked into the neighborhood that treats real issues such as arson, drug use, police brutality, gentrification.

The journey to finished product is also part of the mural’s mission, says Joyce Fernandes, executive director of *archi-treasures*.

“The actual process of research and pulling stories together, uncovering those narratives, is as important as how it is perceived once it is produced,” Fernandes said. “The built environment has become so absorbed by corporate culture with the amount of advertising – the ground beneath our feet is being sold for



advertising on the CTA – that to have this kind of alternative story is really important within that context.

“I think murals should give voice to communities that are unheard and that the voice should be enacted within the built environment so that peoples’ stories become visual.”

Archi-treasures will begin a mural next year on the nationally landmarked Rosenwald Courts, which cover an entire city block between 46th and 47th Streets, Michigan and Wabash Avenues. Sears President Julius Rosenwald developed these apartments in 1929 as affordable to working class African-Americans. Gwendolyn Brooks, Nat King Cole, Quincy Jones and boxer Joe Louis also lived there. DNAInfo noted that the newly completed Rosenwald offers 138 senior units: 60 for the

Chicago Housing Authority, 60 rent-assisted and 18 affordable at a neighborhood threshold. Another 97 family units will include 84 affordable and 13 at market-rate. Rents on the 235 one- and two-bedroom apartments start at \$450; according to forrent.com they go up to \$950. The City contributed \$25 million in tax increment financing (TIF) money toward the more than \$110 million gut rehab of the Rosenwald, vacant since 1999.

Fernandes said *archi-treasures* wants its mural project to reflect the restored Rosenwald’s history, its current community, “its imagined future community -- as well as what it would be like if we had worker housing.” *Archi-treasures* will host discussions to provide this input.

Creating a mural facilitates 1-on-1 discussions for neighbors to determine solutions to urban issues. It’s especially applicable to the violence in Chicago today, she said. “Artists have the ability to create a safe environment for people to say what they think in a way they might not be able to do in a CAPS meeting, for example, or a meeting with the mayor,” Fernandes said. “By bringing people together in a creative process, you’re asking them to move in a pos-

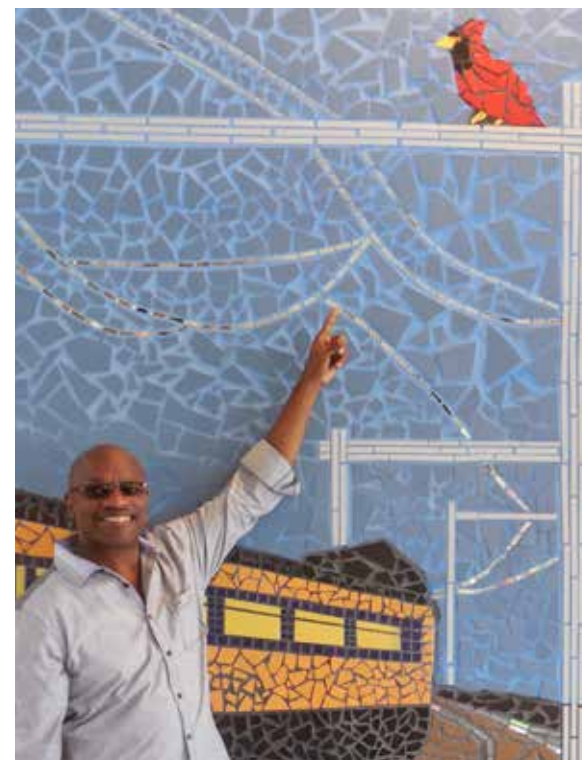
itive direction as opposed to just reflecting on all the things that are wrong.

“When you think about the violence that’s going on, there’s incredible lack of respect for human life. The act of creation is in a way the opposite of that.”

The idea for a mural on two blocks of former railroad property at 1900 W. 49th St. in Back of the Yards stemmed from community meetings convened by Ald. Raymond Lopez (15th ward) after street

violence earlier this summer. “The artwork is part of a bigger conversation about how we can live together, how we can reclaim peace in this community,” Lopez said in prepared material. “The youth are part of the conversation now and we intend to keep it going.” The murals were funded by the McCormick Foundation and the City Department of Family and Support Services’ One Summer Chicago program with support from the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council.

Manny “Matr” Macias was lead artist, assisted by his wife, Brenda “Kozmo” Lopez. She said they were talking one night and decided the theme should be, “Everything starts and ends with love.” Then, they discussed that the images should include a mother and child because, “most



Cutting the ribbon on the new mural under the Marquette/Dorchester Metra underpass in Woodlawn are Ald. Willie Cochran (20th ward), Jordan Taggart and his daughter, Dahlia Taggart. Artist William Hill, who created the Dorchester Botanical Garden, is second from left. (Green Star Movement Photo by Erika Hawkinson) Ald. Cochran points to the mosaic cardinal he worked on (Suzanne Hanney photo) and “Tilt,” a mural by John Pitman Weber at Fullerton and Washtenaw that shows both the community taking care of itself and its challenges. (Chicago Public Art Group Photo)

people, even if they are doing bad things, really love their mothers,” Lopez said.

The start of the mural features Mother Teresa holding a baby as they look into each other’s eyes.

Lopez said they chose Mother Teresa instead of a Latina because she “went above and beyond to give out a lot of love...dedicating her life to serving others. That’s why we depicted the universe, we wanted to make it greater than color, race, where you stand socially – middle class or upper class. All of that gets in the way of how we relate to one another.”

Other images include a silhouette of Saturn, a man in space reaching out to a rainbow of light that morphs into the hair of a little girl blowing a dandelion and making a wish. The idea was that we as explorers make our choices day and night, ideally reaching out to a rainbow, Lopez said. There are peace signs and a diverse group of hands holding up the Earth.

The youths wanted to depict the sun and moon embracing. “They feel things are like day and night around here because the shootings are at night. So they wanted those two images to come together instead of fight.”

On the first day of the seven-week project the couple asked the youths what love meant to them. Everyone agreed they did not want to depict a gun in the project.

Lopez said she was happy about that because of the power of repetition. “Imagery affects our mood. If we use a gun in a mural about ending violence, it’s an oxymoron because they still have to see it every day. So we thought changing the images we see every day could essentially change the way we start acting.”

The 10 youth age 16 to 21 were paid to work 20 hours a week, Monday through Thursday for seven weeks. Having completed the hard work, Lopez said that the kids gained new confidence at the community recognition they received.

“They realized, ‘if I start contributing and doing something with my life I will get more positivity. They felt they had some kind of power, that choices they made had an impact, like when you throw a pebble into water. They didn’t think they had anything like that.’”

As in Woodlawn, Lopez said local people brought the artists food, snacks and water while they were working on the wall in acrylic, spray paint and house paint. Since its completion, businessmen have approached the couple about painting on their buildings. And on Facebook, she saw a post by a young mom who had wanted to move out of the community to finish college until walking past the mural every day lifted her spirits.

A significant visit came from a graffiti artist as the couple was working on the wall.

“He said, ‘I’ve been talking to the guys who bomb these walls. I said you guys were cool. We are going to let you guys do what you do and keep your work clean. I saw how hard the kids were working on it, even in 100-degree weather. And your wife is pregnant [she delivered a baby about five weeks ago], I can’t believe you’re out here every day.’ We thanked them and didn’t want to know who they were.”

The encounter was a bit scary, Lopez admitted, but also much appreciated. In the nearly two months since the wall was dedicated, it has not been touched.



Muhammad Ali walks down 63rd Street in an historic photo reproduced on tiles for the Marquette/Dorchester mural (Suzanne Hanney photo). Bottom two photos: young people working on a mural in Back of the Yards wanted an image of the sun and moon embracing, while the overall theme of the anti-violence mural was “it starts with love.” (15th ward photos).



TENTS REMOVED FROM STEWART SCHOOL; STREET CLEANING UNDER VIADUCTS CONTINUES

by Suzanne Hanney

Only the 75 people who signed up for housing April 5 and 6 will be housed through the City of Chicago’s chronic homelessness pilot, Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) Commissioner Lisa Morrison Butler told Uptown encampment residents at a September 21 meeting at Margate Park.

Meanwhile, weekly cleanings and twice-weekly garbage pickup have resumed under Lake Shore Drive viaducts at Irving Park, Wilson, Lawrence and Foster even as city officials have set an October 14 deadline for a decision on whether or not to allow the residents’ tents to remain.

The reason for the continued discussion over the tents is differing opinions between city agencies, the Mayor’s Office—and the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH). “The City’s position from a legal strategy is that tents are not allowed,” Butler said.

However, she acknowledged a “stalemate” with CCH. Julie Dworkin, CCH director of policy, said later that their agreement with the City allowed residents to keep “portable objects.”

Mark Saulys, a spokesman with Tent City Voices Heard, said before the meeting that the tents were necessary for survival in what they expect to be a hard winter. He asked Butler if the City “intended to be more aggressive in confiscating items” during the weekly cleanups. She responded that oversized items such as reclining lounge chairs would be removed but that the decision on tents was being delayed.

Encampment residents have said the stepped up cleaning of the Lake Shore Drive viaducts is harassment intended to get them to move. But Butler said that wasn’t so.

She said that when the housing assessments began in April, she wanted to establish trust among encampment residents and told the Department of Streets and Sanitation and the Parks crews to ease up. A resulting increase in garbage and even human waste was the reason for the return to weekly street cleaning.

As of the September 21 meeting, 40 people from among the 75 people living under the four viaducts had been housed, Morrison said. But others remaining under the four Uptown viaducts and in front of the former Graeme Stewart School will not be part of a new list.

“One of the things we know is that there are over 1,000 chronically homeless people in the city and they are spread out,” she said. “As we start to expand our efforts it is only fair to look at the population living under the Kennedy expressway, the riverfront, Lower Wacker Drive, Belmont and Kedzie.”

On September 25, residents of the 15 tents in front of Stewart School in the 4500 block of North Broadway were evicted. The building was sold last fall to Morningside Equities Group Inc., which plans to build 64 condominiums with indoor parking there.

Tent City Voices Heard and ONE Northside issued a statement that said with local shelters 95 percent full, the evictions made the encampment residents “refugees in flight...dispers[ed] through the general community.”

Gary Rashkow, who had lived at the Stewart encampment, is now in a tent under the Wilson viaduct.