

LOCAL

A hands-on experience

Library murals made by thousands of hands await last pieces

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TIVERTON — Thousands of ceramic shapes, crafted by thousands of hands of residents, make up two murals in the new Tiverton Public Library, but they won't be complete until the last piece is placed in each one this weekend.

A "mural completion ceremony" is slated for Saturday at 10:30 a.m. in the library's main reception area and the children's room, where the oldest person in the crowd will be asked to place the last piece in the "Trees of Tiverton" mural in the lobby, and the youngest asked to place the last piece in the "Tiverton Alphabet" mural in the children's room.

The projects took five years from concept to finished product and involved meetings with thousands of students and older citizens of the town who took part in the hands-on work. They sculpted some 2,000 faces that make up the bark of the 26 trees in the 17.5 foot-long "Trees of Tiverton" mural, and the creatures and things that make up the 36 foot-long alphabet mural.

Ceramic artists Mika Seeger and Peter Geisser, who have worked on projects together throughout the area for the last 15 years, came up with the designs after asking residents at public charettes: "What makes Tiverton, Tiverton?"

The answers: The landscape, the water, the woods, the people.

The alphabet mural is not the first Seeger has done in a town library. Some 20 years ago, she worked with town children to craft an alphabet mural in the stairwell into the children's room of the Essex Library on Highland Road. Now a private residence, the mural was not portable and could not be removed from the walls.

The alphabet mural in the new library on Roosevelt Way, "kind of became a Tiverton alphabet," Seeger said. "Everything in that mural is something they could find in Tiverton. It's a Tiverton ABC," she said.

Seeger made the letters and asked the children to make something that fit the theme for that letter, such as A is for agriculture, E is for eggs, I is for ice cream, K is for kayaks, L is for lobsters, O is for oysters, R is for rivers, T is for (Tiverton) tigers, Y is for yacht club, and Z is for zipcode, in this case 02878.

“My intent was to make these tiles look like they’re 400 years old,” Seeger said of the coffee-colored tiles she made that hold the block letters, “and the kids be the bright moving part, the part that was actually swirling around” the block letters, she said of their colorful creations.

Take a seat, Geisser tells visitors, because there is so much to see when you get down lower. There are also tiles with braille, American sign language and Morse code throughout both murals.

Geisser said there are many funny stories they can tell from the projects.

During a workshop, one young boy picked a block from a box that directed him to make something that has to do with lobsters.

“He said I can’t do a lobster. I’m allergic to shellfish,” Geisser recalled, saying Tiverton mothers have done a very good job warning their children to stay away from things they are allergic to.

Tiles with the word “Touch” and “Please touch,” are in many places on the mural. The artists want people to run their fingers along the tiles. There is just one warning, in tile of course, near the I is for ice cream tile that features life size ice cream cones: “You can touch the ice cream, but do not lick it.”

Funding for the murals came from many sponsors, through the Tiverton Library Foundation, including the Champlin Foundation, Carter Family Fund, Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, Tiverton artist Ginger Lacy, John Clarke Trust, Herman Rose Library Fund, Newport County Fund, Tiverton Yacht Club, Tiverton Casino Hotel and Bay Coast Bank.

Tiverton Library Foundation member Eileen Browning said “an enormous amount of work went into this at all levels,” and it will last for generations.

Browning put a quote in a press release for the mural completion project that she attributes to Seeger: “It is rare that a young person has the opportunity to create part of a large art project which will live on in the community for generations.”

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