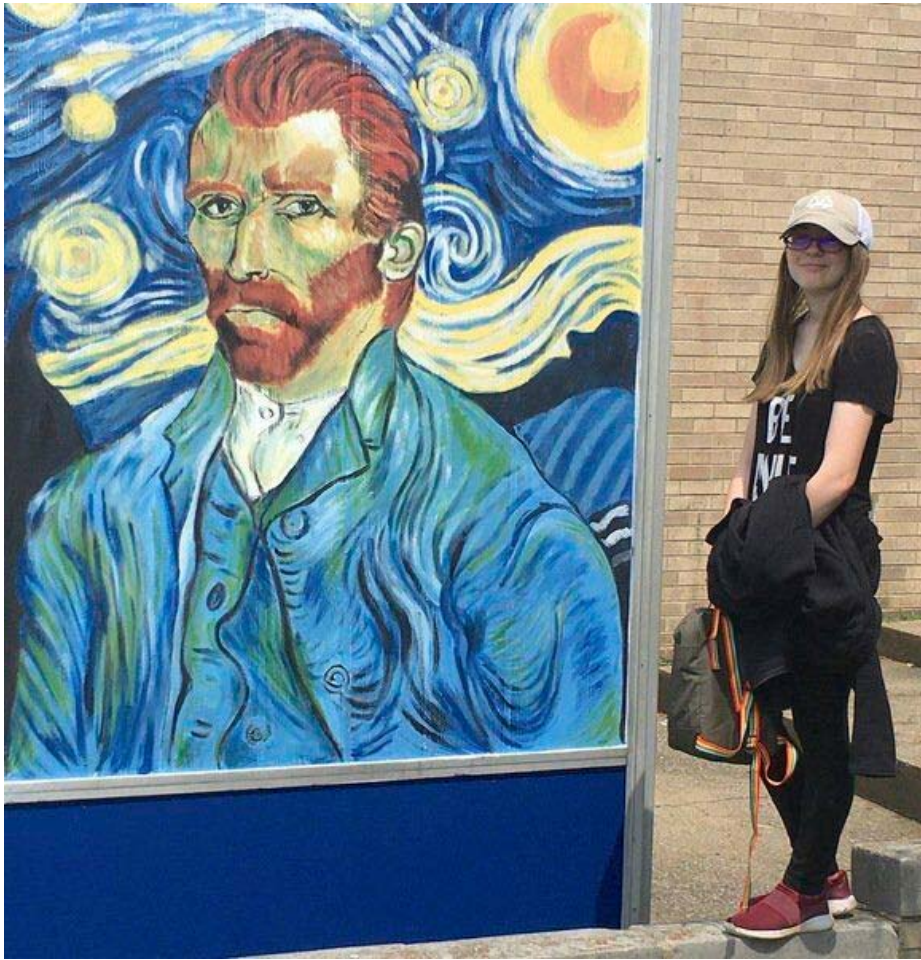




https://www.ncnewsonline.com/news/lifestyles/mural-promotes-dons-mission-strong-and-able/article_b9c7bdd7-1465-51a0-8c53-043f71004cef.html

Mural promotes DON's mission: 'Strong and Able'

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Since its inception in 2003, D.O.N. has been focused on empowering people with disabilities to live as independently as they choose — from providing Advocacy, skills training, peer support, information and referral services to attendant care, home modifications and wellness activities.

In recent years, the agency's interest in building integrated communities has expanded beyond its clients to encompass the revitalization of neighborhoods, establishment of community gardens, and the rehabilitation of several properties downtown.

“Their work is transformative,” said Art & Education at the Hoyt’s Executive Director Kimberly Koller-Jones, “Not just for their clients but for the communities they live in – and that really appeals to me. Sometimes the best way you can serve the people is from outside your own walls.”

That’s certainly the spirit behind the art center’s public art program which employs local artists to create public works to improve public spaces. Think parks, libraries, hospitals or other non-profit/municipal owned buildings. Two of the program’s earliest efforts can be found in the stairwell of New Castle’s Municipal Parking Garage and the east wall of the Lawrence County YMCA. Last year the Hoyt funded the creation of a large garden sculpture for the Lower East Side Community Garden and is currently working on one for the South Side garden.

Thus when DON approached the Hoyt about funding a mural on the façade of their Harrison Avenue location, the Hoyt didn’t hesitate to entertain the proposal. DON’s only challenge was identifying a local artist to complete the work in compliance with the criteria of the ArtWorksHere program.

“At the time, there was an issue with connecting artists to organizations and vice versa. We had just begun putting together a list of area artists to overcome this but did not have very many options available,” said Koller-Jones. “My daughter, Hannah, asked if she could be considered. I wasn’t sure, but after consulting with the Art Committee, they said yes.”

“Mom wasn’t exactly easy on me though,” said Hannah Jones. “She wanted to be sure that if I was selected it was because I earned it. So I did everything needed and then some to work with DON on a proposal.”

This included meeting with representatives to discuss a concept for the 6’ x 38’ façade of the former Thaddeus Stevens school building.

“I’m not going to lie. It was overwhelming at first. I remember discussing the idea of superheroes at one point, but I didn’t know how that would fit in to the neighborhood,” said the 19-year-old artist. “I just sat there in my car looking at the building. Then it occurred to me as I was watching their clients coming and going that being a hero meant overcoming incredible odds. That’s what these people were doing, and that’s what sparked the idea for the mural.”

Jones spent the next week researching famous people who are as recognized for their disability as their talents with the intention of completing larger than life portraits to fill the eight spaces naturally framed by the architecture. She made a long list of possibilities as she felt it was important to represent all kinds of people and challenges to convey the message ‘there are no limits for any of us’. DON embraced the concept with one request. Include a portrait of Ed Roberts, the founder of the

Independent Living Movement.

“Ed Roberts fought for the rights of people with disabilities to leave institutions and live independently in their own community,” says Chris Lloyd, Executive Director of Disability Options Network. “Our mission to empower people with disabilities to live as independently as they choose is built on the philosophy started by the Father of the Independent Living movement.”

When making her final selections Jones reflected that she hoped by including some easily recognizable portraits – like Stephen Hawking and Vincent Van Gogh – that it sparked the viewer’s curiosity about the people they didn’t know. She also included little clues about the person in each frame with references to their occupation. For example, the diagrams of John Nash’s equilibrium theory on the chalkboard behind him. Reference to the book jacket for Agatha Christies famed novel, Murder on the Oriental Express, behind her portrait.

Jones titled the finished work The Face of Disability. Individuals represented include Ed Roberts, Frida Kahlo, Stephen Hawking, Jamie Brewer, Stevie Wonder, Vincent Van Gogh, Agatha Christie and John Nash. Each portrait is roughly 5’ wide x 6’ tall.

“We are thrilled to showcase disability history with these murals across the front of our Center for Independent Living building,” says Lloyd. “These images remind us that there are no limits for those with disabilities.”

“I can’t take all the credit,” admitted Jones, “Some days my mom worked with me to keep me company, make a suggestion, or help me solve a problem. We worked back and forth on pieces like she used to do with her mom. It was kind of rite of passage for me.”

Hannah Jones is a 2018 graduate of New Castle Senior High. She is currently a junior at Hollins University in Roanoke, VA studying Biology with a certificate in Leadership. While she plans on becoming a large animal veterinarian, she continues to draw, paint, knit or otherwise create art every day.

“I’m hoping I can line up a few more murals next summer,” she says. “I loved doing it and it sure helped offset college expenses this year.”

The Hoyt encourages both artists and organizations interested in applying to the ArtWorksHere program to contact Koller-Jones at director@hoytartcenter.org.

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