



Artists Brent Billingsley and Michael Coppage alongside the mural at South Avondale Elementary School, called the Concrete Jungle.

South Avondale Mural Offers Hope and Sense of Pride

Students at South Avondale Elementary School can now get an important life lesson in a place you might least expect: on the school playground.

In a matter of two weeks, Brent Billingsley and Michael Coppage transformed a white concrete wall into something spectacular. It's easy to see the two Cincinnati Children's team members have a passion for art and the community.

You can't miss the mural. It's bold and bright and catches your attention for many reasons. It is with strokes of expert artistry and a whole lot of love, the duo have provided a gift to the students of South Avondale Elementary and the community.

"For me it's perpetuating our history, telling stories that could be scrubbed from history if we don't continue to tell them," said Coppage.

The mural features the late Cincinnati Vice Mayor Marian Spencer and community leader and former South Avondale Elementary School teacher, William Joel McCray, both have roots in Avondale. One end of the mural shows both as children, the other end shows them as adults. In the middle, a jungle, representing their struggle.

"Once they understand who these people are and what they've done, I'd like for them to see themselves in the children, and understand that you have to go through some things in life to be the people we all hope to be, recognized by history, respected and accomplished," Coppage said.

Billingsley and Coppage both work with patients at the College Hill campus, using art as therapy for children who are dealing with trauma and mental health challenges.

"When patients are zoned in and working on a project, it's refreshing to see them just be in the moment, and that's when they open up and start telling you everything. They'll start draining off some emotions," Billingsley said.

In this case though, Billingsley and Coppage are the ones who poured out their emotions onto a concrete canvas. A labor of love. The community sent that love right back. At various stages of the project, children of all ages showed up to see how they could help. In some cases, creating their own art with sidewalk chalk.

"We love it. We want the community to feel a sense of ownership. This is for everyone to enjoy and find inspiration. It's special, knowing that this mural is at an elementary school makes me very, very happy," said Billingsley.

The final touches on the mural will come from students at South Avondale Elementary who will put handprints on a section of the wall, so they can make their own mark.

The mural project is part of the Reds Community Makeover, a partnership with the Cincinnati Reds, Cincinnati Children's, Procter and Gamble, the Cincinnati Zoo and others. Most of the community projects are on hold until 2021, due to COVID-19.

This is the second major project for Billingsley and Coppage. Both worked on the Black Lives Matter mural in downtown Cincinnati.

If you get a chance, stop by to see the mural at South Avondale Elementary. It's worth the trip to see how paint on a concrete wall is creating a sense of community pride and hope.



Celebrating Avondale: Cool Trails, Hot Lights

Community partners are shining a light on walking trails in Avondale in more ways than one.

On Oct. 30, Artworks, Avondale Community Council, Avondale Development Corporation, Cincinnati Children's and others came together to help dedicate a series of light fixtures that bring art and culture to the walking trail at the Hirsch Recreation Center.

"This project is huge. Residents want to feel connected and included as part of the renaissance that is taking place, and this project helps make that happen," said Sandra Jones, president of the Avondale Community Council.

The "Sunflowers" sculptures features solar powered lights that are inspired by African kente cloth designs. Each flower has a center that is designed with the help of community members from Avondale.

"My design was inspired by the tremendous strength of the community of Avondale, and the bright colors speak to the vibrant diversity and personality that exists here," said artist Matt Grote.

Also included in the project are four neon light fixtures that feature uplifting messages.

Linnea Gartin, Artworks, added: "It's an artistic representation of the vision that neighbors have for the future of Avondale. This is also a demonstration of how artists can partner with the community to create a beautiful vision of the neighborhood."

Switch On Avondale is nationally funded public art project made possible with the help of a matching grant from Cincinnati Children's.

"We're proud to support projects to promote civic pride in Avondale and that showcases how vibrant 'this community is,'" said Nerissa Morris, senior vice president and Chief Human Resources and Diversity officer at Cincinnati Children's.

"Innovation like this doesn't just belong downtown. A project like this belongs in every neighborhood," said Gartin.



Community Turns Out to Fight the Flu

It's a year that could have easily put a pause on the First Ladies annual Family Health Day. Instead, on Sunday Oct. 11 hundreds of families turned out to protect themselves from the flu in the midst of a pandemic.

Cincinnati Children's partnered once again with Kroger to offer flu shots at no cost, for anyone who wanted one.

"It was terrific seeing community members excited to get their flu shots and protect themselves and their children," said Dr. Joe Real, Cincinnati Children's.

The First Ladies is a group of women representing Cincinnati area churches and the wife of Cincinnati Mayor John Cranley, focused on health and wellness in underserved communities. This is the sixth year for Family Health Day.

"We're happy for everyone who turned out to take charge of their health and especially since this is the most challenging of any year we have had it," said Dena Cranley, co-chair of First Ladies for Health.



Health Day was hosted in nine locations in greater Cincinnati, including South Avondale Elementary School, Price Hill Recreation Center and New Prospect Baptist Church where more than 350 flu shots were administered.

This year's event also included drive up COVID-19 testing. "We identified neighborhoods with especially high COVID-19 positivity rates and made sure we were there. We not only got people from the targeted neighborhoods but were able to draw people from Indiana and Kentucky. So we expanded our reach. It was a great day," said Cranley.

In many cases, families with children of all ages showed up and waited to get a flu shot. "There were no in-person church services. We didn't have the built-in audience that we would normally have on Health Day. The people who came had to make a special trip, and that was meaningful," said Barbara Lynch, co-chair, First Ladies for Health.

Dr. Real added, "I was impressed with how open everyone was, talking about the flu shot. After a brief conversation of how important it is this year during the pandemic to be protected, one individual was even willing to have his very first flu shot."



Avondale Community Leaders Tour the Critical Care Building

On Friday, Oct. 30, members of the Avondale community put on hard hats and goggles to tour the Critical Care Building construction site. This was an opportunity for community members to get a sneak peek at the progress and ask questions of project managers. In addition, community members received an update on supplier diversity and workforce diversity. As of early November, the construction project has committed to spend \$112 million dollars with diverse suppliers with an engagement of 73 minority and women owned businesses. The project is exceeding 26% of diverse workforce participation, and is on track to create 50 full-time sustainable jobs for residents of the Uptown area.



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