



Pittsboro Haw River Mural Project Story

January 30th- June 1st, 2008

Abundance NC Mission Statement:

To Create models for educating communities on healthy answers to the many challenges that confront populations today. This includes community building, economic development, and upgrading our towns image.

Finished Results:

1300 volunteer hours, 15 local professional artists, 10 special middle school artists, and over 100 community members of all ages and ethnicities, came together to create this testament to the river that gives us water to quench our thirst and the ability to engage in nature through its beauty. The mural brings this beauty, community commitment and pride to the downtown of Pittsboro.

Diane Swan

Special Thanks to Suz Robinson,
whose notes, pictures, and editing
helped me get this story told.
And Geo DeSocio for technical
assistance.

September, 2023
Copyright 2023, Diane Swan

Pittsboro Haw River Mural Project Story

Blair Building, Pittsboro, NC

Began January 30th, 2008- June 1st, 2008

By Diane Swan, Co-Facilitator of the project

June 1st 2023, it was 15 years since we dedicated the Mural. Stacye the lead mural artist and I have been talking about doing a "Refurb" of this amazing work. Among other things it needs are faded colors brightened, contrasts increased, lines thickened, and all of it resealed. We'd also like to install a new readable plaque adding some forgotten names. At the time this project was called "The Pittsboro Mural Project" because it was Pittsboro's first mural. There since have been more murals added to the town, so I've named this the "Pittsboro Haw River Mural Project Story". I decided to tell the story of it's creation because I realized that many new people to our town/county don't know about this amazing community collaboration.

The Story begins.

I met Suz Robinson as my neighbor in Bynum. She worked with 5th-7th graders at Horton Middle School in the Reconnecting Youth Program as part of the Partnership for DrugFreeNC. My daughter was in Horton and I was looking for a school related creative outlet. We began discussing things we could do with the "middle schoolers" that would be fun.

We started by working on a Benefit to Support the Chatham County Schools Fuel Up Program. This program adds food to backpacks. Cash proceeds would go to food cards for eligible families for Thanksgiving. In November 2007, we put together The Magical Musical Benefit with help from Holly Duncan of The Fuel Up Program, Kim Caraganis of Chatham County Together, George Gregerholt of Chatham Community for Alcohol and Drug Free Youth, and Horton Principal Mervin Jenkins who was the star school rapper. The band Rootzie provided music, along with Jason P. Gabriel of Mr. Coffee and the Creamers. Added entertainment was provided by the Reconnecting Youth Group made up of 5th, 6th, and 7th graders, the 8th grade Academically gifted class, the 8th grade chorus, and Horton's STEP team.

It was a grand adventure and a great success!

Making a Dream Reality

We knew Stacye Leanza from her beautiful mural creations in Siler City.

Erick Davis had created a window Mural of Pam Smith, White Buffalo Spirit and Clyde Jones on the Pittsboro General Store front left windows and was completing the Chatham County landscape mural on the back wall of the big new event space of the restaurant.

Travis Cohn had just come back from creating murals in Guatemala.

I was doing art classes with instructor Juan DiGiulio at the ArtsCenter in Carrboro and knew a bunch of wonderful creative people from classes and around the county.

We wanted to work with middle school students, but we also wanted to include the community. Chatham County has so many talented local artists. We thought why not bring positive mentoring through the arts.

We all decided on “Saving the Haw River” as the theme since the river represents an integral part in all our lives with the water we drink, and the beauty it brought.

The Haw River Assembly kept track of the health of the river with regular water monitoring and yearly cleanup. Their Annual Haw River Festival introduced the county’s 4th graders to the wonders of the river.

The State Park Trails were used by everyone.



Designing

The designing process began after school the first Wednesday in February 2008. Stacye Leanza, Travis Cohn, Erick Davis, and Suz began meeting with seven 7th graders from Horton Middle School and three students from Our Neighborhood School in Pittsboro.

Stacye showed them her process for designing the Murals she created in Siler City, and then started brainstorming ideas for the river mural. The students came up with the basic idea for the mural. Their ideas were brought together into a final sketch by Stacye and Travis.



After school designing with 7th Graders from Horton



Student from Our Neighborhood School, Pittsboro

Each student was tasked with developing an animal, they could draw on the mural themselves, which was part of the river's habitat. That's when it became apparent that most of the students had only seen the river from driving over the 15-501 bridge. So, we took a field trip to the river's State Park trail and Bynum Bridge. Erick Davis showed the students how to "SEE" an image in their minds by looking through a rectangle cut in a piece of white paper.



How to view an image for sketching

Visiting the Haw River



Where will it go?

Next, we began looking for sites for the mural in downtown. Then mayor Randy Voller, put us in touch with the assistant county manager in charge of leased county government buildings. We looked at the side of the County Parks and Recreation Office, now Red Moose Brewing. We also considered Beggars and Choosers, Pam and Snuffy Smith's store, and the Mathiesen Clinic, where Molly Matlock and the Chatham County Arts Council's main office was at that time.

We finally settled on the south side of the Blair Building thanks to owner Elizabeth Anderson's enthusiasm and blessing.



Blair Hotel and Hall Department Store, 1960, Courtesy of Chatham Historical Museum

Then we needed funding.

We looked for a partner for a Grassroots Arts Grant. First, we tried The Chatham Arts Council, then Chatham County Together, and finally The Abundance Foundation. But the bottom line was that we didn't have the seed money we needed. We decided to work with donations. Tami Schwerin and The Abundance Foundation took us on as their very first fiscal sponsorship program. They accepted the funds in a program in the name of The Pittsboro Mural Project and paid out as needed. This program became the start of the Abundance Foundation's non-profit which incubated dozens of projects around the triangle.

The Abundance Mission Statement was: To Create models for educating communities on healthy answers to the many challenges that confront populations today. This includes community building, economic development and upgrading our towns image.

Pre-Prime cleaning

I had met Geo DeSocio in my art class, and he was not just an artist, but a master of many things. I told him about the idea Suz and I had, and he was all in. So, in mid-March, I filled in and caulked the window. Geo brought a power washer. Geo, Scotty Young, and I power washed and scrubbed the wall – ready for priming.



Diane and Geo DeSocio cleaning the Blair Building wall



Scotty Young and Geo DeSocio power cleaning the mural wall

Priming the wall

After laying out the size, we got local artists to help us prime the surface and get it ready for Art!



Juan DiGiulio, Geo DeSocio, Linda Collura, Liz Tedesco, and Diane Swan

Drawing begins.

On a very chilly Tuesday evening at the end of March, the Pittsboro Police closed off the intersection between the Pittsboro General store and the Blair Building. A vehicle (jeep?) was parked in the triangular grassy area with a projector on top. Once it was dark, the image was projected onto the wall and a gathering of artists, teachers, and children came together and traced the lines with carpenters' crayons.





Painting begins End of March 2008

After spending two months meeting weekly at Horton Middle School to design their individual animals, the painting of the mural began. Release forms were signed by Parent/caregiver. We began meeting Tuesdays and Thursdays after school when it was apparent the mural wouldn't be finished prior to the end of the school year. First Sundays were for families and friends of the children. Third Saturdays were for community involvement. Student artists attended many of the weekend sessions and took leadership roles in explaining the mural to community members.



Organizing colors before students get there



1st Day Painting



Our Neighborhood School



Cleanup at the end of the day



Aulden Academy and Donation Table 4-3-08





Students and Artists 4-10-08



Dedication ceremony



The very last painting on the mural was added after the unveiling on June 1st, 2008. Linda Collura, who worked the whole mural as an artist, helps her handicapped son Larrie, paint the last animal (fish).

The Pittsboro Mural Project gratefully acknowledges:

Stacye Leanza, Lead muralist

Travis Cohn, Assistant muralist

Artists who worked throughout with the painting and helping the kids develop their animals for the mural: **Erick Davis, Diane Swan, Suz Robinson, George DeSocio, Linda Collura, Charity Alston, Jenny Young, Liz Tedesco, Beth Goldston, Angela Cadman, and Solar Antonari**

The students that were the main force in the idea and the creation of the mural: **Jessica Catalan, Stephen Gerring, Trayvon Mangum, Brenda Martinez, Justin Platon, Tony Sanders, and Zach VanHoy** of Horton Middle School 7th grade 2007-2008.

Additional drawings by **Angus Cadman, Alexander McKenzie, Thomas Schultz**, Of Our Neighborhood School 5th and 7th grades 2007-2008.

Soren Leanza added a sunken ship, and **Larrie Collura** contributed the last animal (fish) with the help of his mom at the dedication.

Special thanks to **Scout Troop 977** under the leadership of **Yvette Navarro**, and the **Auden Academy** students for their time painting with us.

Additional Students painters came from: UNC, NC State, Northwood, Jordan Matthews, Chatham New School, Perry Harrison, JS Waters, Silk Hope, Bonlee, Moncure, Community Independent School, Pittsboro Elementary School, and Home Schoolers

Our Sponsor:

Tami Schwerin and the Abundance Foundation

We can't say enough about. She supported this project all the way. She provided us with the energy and ability to connect with a non-profit for accepting tax deductible donations. Tami's exuberance for this community and her smiling, seemingly tireless work ethic, is an incredible asset for Chatham County.

Elizabeth Anderson for her blessing and the use of the Blair Building wall.

Pittsboro Merchants Association and Leslie Fesperman for their continued support throughout.

All the **business owners** that were so patient with our comings and goings with all the children.

Mayor Voller, for his support throughout.

The Pittsboro Town Board for proclaiming June 1st 2008 as Pittsboro Mural Day, and passing the proclamation 5-0.

Molly Matlock and The Chatham Arts Council for their emotional support.

Shakori Hills for the use of their tent for the dedication ceremony.

Dave Swan for the donation of the scaffolding for 3 months.

Vance and the General Store Cafe for providing the Burrito Bash.

The Ladies of Ferrington for their quilt for our Burrito Bash Auction

Clyde Jones for his Critter donation for the Auction.

George DeSocio, who not only painted, but washed and primed the wall, provided the power washer, hoses, photography, and assistance every day.

Scotty Young for all the ink cartridges for printing, helping anywhere needed including washing and priming the wall, working our donation table, and helping with the dedication ceremony with Rootzie.

Rootzie, for being willing to play for the dedication ceremony.

All those businesses and Groups that donated: **Fearrington Arts and Crafts Club, Beggars and Choosers (Pam and Snuffy Smith), Wood Moods (Diane Swan), G-Wiz (Geo DeSocio), Jorgie Brown (Pittsboro General Store)**

Co-Facilitators:

Diane Swan: for providing painting materials; washing and priming the wall; painting; grant writing, creating email list, press releases, promotional materials; information booths at Shakori Hills, Clydefest, and the Haw River Festival.

Suz Robinson: who gave her time first every Wednesday, then Tuesdays, Thursdays and Weekends, after hours, working with the students from many schools; organizing the painting schedules; getting kids to the mural and home; making sure students had snacks: being there on the spot to help with every little detail through the entire two months of drawing and three months of painting; and in a very rare quite moment, even got to paint herself.



Stacye Leanza

Pittsboro Mural Project

"This mural is dedicated to the creative energy of Chatham County citizens who seek harmony with each other and the environment."

June 1, 2008

1300 hours went into this project, from students, artists and the community.

Students who developed the ideas and drew the animals were:
Jessica Catalan, Stephen Gerring, Trayvon Mangum, Granda Martinez,
Justin Nelson, Tony Sanders, and Zach Vandyke.

Additional drawings by: Angus Cadman, Alexander McKenzie,
and Thomas Schultz.

Tracy Leanza, Lead muralist; Travis Cohn, Assistant muralist;
Diane Swan and Suzanne Robinson, coordinators.

The Abundance Foundation and Tami Schwerin

Artists, Brick Davis and George DeSoria

All whose leadership was essential.

TOWN OF

RANDOLPH VOLLER
Mayor

WILLIAM G. TERRY
Town Manager

PAUL S. MESSICK, JR.
Town Attorney

P.O. Box 759 – 635 East Street
PITTSBORO, N.C. 27312



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

GENE BROOKS
HUGH HARRINGTON
PAMELA BALDWIN
CHRIS WALKER
CLINTON E. BRYAN III

TELEPHONE
(919) 542-4621
FAX (919) 542-7109

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, The Abundance Foundation partnering with Diane Swan and Suzanne Robinson along with others in the community; and

WHEREAS, they have created a beautiful community mural on the side of the “Historic Blair Hotel” and across from the General Store Café; and

WHEREAS, the murals theme is “Saving the Haw River”; and

WHEREAS, the mural was designed by professional mural artists (Stacye Leanaz, Erick Davis and Travis Cohn) using ideas created by middle school students from the Pittsboro area; and

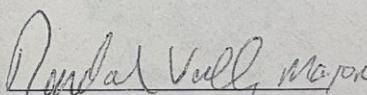
WHEREAS, it was painted by students, family and friends and the community in downtown Pittsboro; and

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, by the Town of Pittsboro Board of Commissioners that June 1, 2008 be

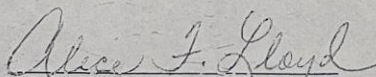
PITTSBORO MURAL DAY

in the Town of Pittsboro.

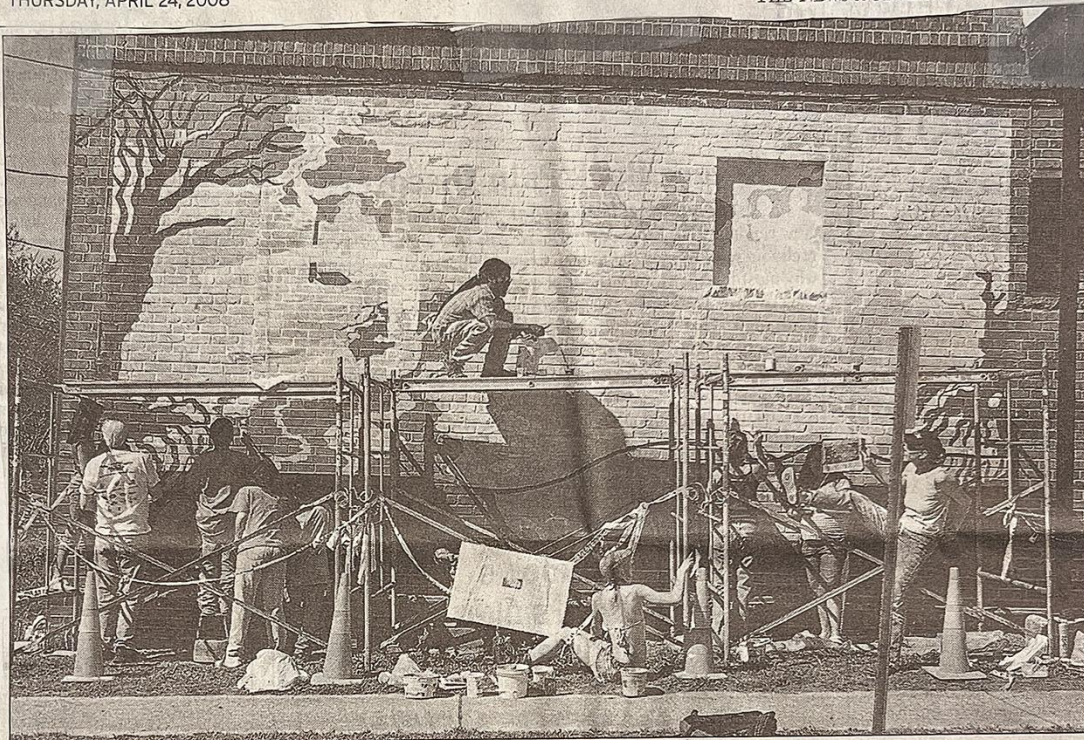
Adopted this the 27th day of May, 2008.


Randolph Voller, Mayor

ATTEST:


Alice F. Lloyd, CMC, Town Clerk

CHARTERED 1787



Students, artists and community members help paint the first mural of the Pittsboro Mural Project on a brick wall at Goodnight Gracie Antiques. The project is an effort to connect children, the community and artists.

STAFF PHOTO BY LESLIE BARBOUR

Mural celebrates community

By ERIN CALLENDER
STAFF WRITER

PITTSBORO - After working together last fall on a benefit for Horton Middle School, Suzanne Robinson and Diane Swan found themselves wondering what their next project would be.

They found their answer in a few cans of paint, some creative students and a bare brick wall in downtown Pittsboro.

Robinson, program specialist for Partnership for a Drug-Free North Carolina, organized a mural project for students in Re-connecting Youth, a Horton program that promotes self-esteem, healthy decision-making and positive peer relationships.

The mural, "Saving the Haw," shows community members working together to pick trash out of a polluted Haw River.

It's being painted on the side of Goodnight Gracie Antiques. The two-story space, provided by Elizabeth Anderson of Heartwood Realty, sits across the street from the General Store Cafe.

"This mural project is a way to instill pride in the students," Robinson said, "to let them see that their thoughts and creative ideas are valued by peers, adults and the community at large."

After visiting the Haw River for inspiration, the students shared their ideas with lead artist Stacy Leanza, who composed the mural image. Each student picked an animal or plant to draw on the wall.

"It's really interesting to work on this mural with students," Leanza said. "It's been hard and lots of work, but also really fun and fulfilling."

HOW YOU CAN HELP

To help paint, contact Suzanne Robinson at srobinson@drugfreenc.org.

To make a donation or see a sketch of the mural design, visit www.theabundancefoundation.org/pittsboro-mural.

One of the students, Justin Platon, a seventh-grader and RY member, hopes more people will get involved.

"The mural helps the town, river and the environment," he said. "I'm going to be drawing a deer."

Community members and groups are encouraged to stop by and participate. Robinson and the students will be painting throughout the next two months.

The project is sponsored by the Abundance Foundation, a nonprofit organization that promotes community building and economic development.

The Pittsboro Merchants Association will dedicate the mural June 1. The festivities will include a performance by local band Rootzie, and presentations by Horton's principal, Mervin Jenkins; Mayor Randy Voller; and Elaine Chiosso, executive director of the Haw River Assembly.

"This is such a fun and exciting thing for me," said Swan, an artist and cabinetmaker.

"This mural brings the community together while helping the town's image," she said. "It gets students involved in things outside of sitting behind a computer all the time."

The Chatham Record

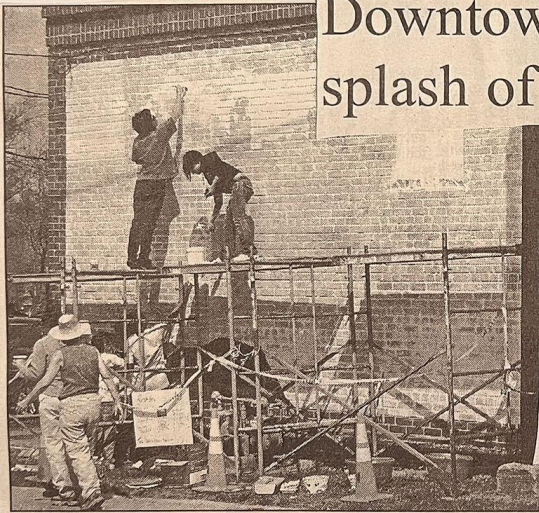
Published at Pittsboro, North Carolina 27312

Chatham News Publishing Co., Inc. - All Rights Reserved
Vol. 130 • No. 18 USPS 101-220

Thursday, April 3, 2008

26 Pages • Price 50¢

Downtown Pittsboro gets splash of color with mural



By Bill Willcox

A two-story mural is being painted near the courthouse circle in Pittsboro, with a dedication ceremony scheduled for June 1.

The idea for the Pittsboro Mural Project originated last fall after the Magical Musical Benefit at Horton Middle School. Suzanne Robinson and Diane Swan were looking for a new project to bring the community together.

In December, Robinson connected up with Stacye Leanza, a local mural artist, to see what she thought of the idea of a downtown mural. She was all for it.

Bill Willcox photo

A new work of art in progress . . .

Flowers aren't the only thing blossoming this spring. Art is blossoming, too, with this two-story mural being painted near the courthouse circle in Pittsboro. A dedication ceremony for the new creation is scheduled for June 1.

And it began. Next came the planning. Organizers wanted to work with the middle school students, but also wanted to include the community.

"There are so many talented artists in Chatham County," said Diane Swan. "We thought how fun it would be to get them together and bring positive mentoring through the arts. Since Diane and Suzanne both enjoy the Haw River, the theme was born 'Saving the Haw'."

In February Stacye and her assistant muralist Travis Cohn, began meeting with the students Wednesdays after

school at Horton Middle School. Other artists and muralist soon joined in. Erick Davis, the well-known General Store Café muralist, came along and discussed drawing from nature on a student trip to the Haw to see the animals and plants that are a part of the river ecosystem.

The students came up with the basic idea for the mural, and they are each working on an animal or plant that they can draw on the mural themselves. Their ideas were joined together into the final sketch by Stacye and Travis.

Meanwhile, organizers began working on fundraising, purchasing supplies, and finding a wall. In March they approached Elizabeth Anderson about using the side of her "Blair Hotel" building across from the General Store Café. She was all for it. They needed a non-profit sponsor so that tax deductible contributions could be made, and turn their dream into a reality. Schwerin and the Abundance Foundation agreed to sponsor the project. Their mission is to create models for educating communities on healthy answers to the many challenges that confront

See 'Mural' page 2-A



Suz Robinson



Diane Swan