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Mural lights up library

Upgrades under way include savanna scene in kids' room

By Julie Pendray 2 A.M.AUG. 13, 2009

Visitors entering the children's room at the main Escondido library are discovering a bright-peach sky over a tree-dotted African savanna that's unfolding on a mural stretching across a 92-foot-long wall. "A lot of people say, "Wow!" said Eveleen Crouthamel, a senior library associate. "Others say the colors remind them of the movie 'Madagascar'."

Escondido artist Julia Anthony is painting the African savanna scene as part of renovations to the library on Kalmia Street. Children are watching the scene appear, with great anticipation. "I think it's pretty", said Xena Morataya, 11, of Escondido. "It makes me feel happy."

A couple of weeks ago, the wall was covered by scaffolding. Anthony started the mural June 22 and expects to complete it in September. Then she'll start painting the alcove outside the children's room with a jungle theme and baby animals. She said that should take three to five weeks.

The money was raised by the library's endowment foundation and earmarked before the recession, city librarian Laura Mitchell said.

"I think it's a wonderful way to teach children the value of nature and about their responsibility to take care of our planet," said Anthony, who has been painting since age 17 and has owned a mural business for 10 years. "In today's society, children are in front of TV and video games so much.

Anthony might paint another mural on the opposite wall in the children's room. "We'd like to do something that will appeal to preschoolers, because that's their section," Mitchell said. "These murals will be a lasting inspiration for the children of Escondido. I hope the art will inspire children to pick up books and read about the animals and learn about new subjects." She's coordinating with the Wild Animal Park to offer programs in the children's room.

Library staff members expect the library's renovations to be completed this fall. Other work includes new carpet, chairs and lighting throughout the library. The bright orange ducts hanging from the ceiling in the children's room also will be painted, even though they would now match the scene on the wall. "We're sick of that orange," Mitchell said. "Goodness knows how many years they've been that color."

Library visitors can watch Anthony paint the mural from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday. "I get in my savanna zone after an hour or two, then I could paint for 10 or 12 hours," Anthony said. "Quite frankly, when I have a brush in my hand, it's the closest feeling to heaven."