



Timm Etters

The man behind the murals

By: Karen Dix

You may not know his face, but you've probably seen his work. This artist is responsible for the "Printed Word" mural at the corner of Van Buren and Main, and those vibrant, school mascot murals that seem to leap off the walls of our Naperville schools. He's muralist Timm Etters, and he loves beautifying our town.

Etters has completed more than 280 murals in his 25 years as an artist, and Naperville enjoys the highest number in any single community (58 and counting!) in the foyers, gyms, and hallways of our schools.

"I'm proud that most of my work is in Naperville," says Etters. "It's a town that supports the arts and makes children a priority," he said.

Teaching His Craft

Etters is currently supervising a new downtown art project launched by KidsMatter, a not-for-profit organization offering experiences, relationships, opportunities and values to empower children, and Century Walk, the downtown public-arts program. Etters will supervise teams of 10 art students from each

of the five area high schools to paint murals in the elevator foyers of the Van Buren parking garage, across the street from this magazine's offices. Each mural will identify a specific floor of the parking deck with its high school's colors and mascot as a system for people to locate their cars. They will also function as a school mural, boosting community spirit and encouraging young talent.

The project is funded by Naperville SECA (Special Events and Cultural Amenities) grants obtained by KidsMatter and Century Walk, and material donations from Badger Air-Brush of Franklin Park.

KidsMatter Executive Director IdaLynn Wenhold hired Etters under the enthusiastic recommendation of Melea Smith from District 203. "Tim has a passion for helping young people use their creative gifts to benefit others," said Wenhold.

The story of Etters' first mural is almost a legend. As a youth, he relentlessly pursued his own dream of becoming an artist, in spite of his red-green color blindness and a bout with testicular cancer in high

school. He emerged from the illness with a continued interest in hip hop and graffiti, which inspired him to spray paint an impressive mural honoring the Vietnam Veterans on an overpass. Later, a police officer (and veteran himself) identified Etters as the overpass graffiti artist from the similarly styled, spray painted t-shirt Etters was wearing. He took Etters to the school principal who "sentenced" him to turn in his spray can for an airbrush, and complete 132 hours of community service over Christmas break. Etters painted an 8' x 40' mural in the school cafeteria to honor the 25th anniversary of Cary-Grove High School.

Paying It Forward

"So many art teachers and administrators have encouraged me over the years," admits Etters. "I love interacting with the kids and always try to encourage them to pursue their own dreams, no matter what comes their way."

Students from Naperville Central began painting the fifth-floor rooftop elevator foyer of the Van Buren parking garage last month. Now people exiting the elevator will see



a bold depiction of the Central Redhawk. On the walls leading outside, the students will paint their favorite Naperville summer activities, an idea inspired by one of the KidsMatter's "developmental assets" for children—"the constructive use of time." Additional KidsMatter themes will appear on other parking levels.

Etters says each mural will take about six weeks of summer work to complete, and the entire project will take three to five years. Schools will be represented in descending order from the oldest to the youngest school, with Central on the fifth floor, North on the fourth, Waubonsie on the third, Neuqua on the second, and Metea on the first.

Participating students applied through their school's art department and submitted portfolios. They will receive credit for the summer independent study, and also discover the full range of skills required for an artist to complete a commissioned task.

With Etters at the helm, students also will be learning one of life's most important lessons: never give up on your dreams.

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