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'Bold' mural emerging for Elmhurst University sesquicentennial



Elmhurst University students and staff members picked this winning design by art faculty members Rafael Blanco and Andrew Sobol for a new mural honoring the school's sesquicentennial. It's to be located on the north-facing wall of the R.A. Faganel Hall athletic facility. (Courtesy of Elmhurst University)

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A massive wall mural is emerging at Elmhurst University. It will unquestionably "Be Bold," and it will be very blue.

"You cannot miss it," said artist Rafael Blanco of Aurora.

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Blanco, an Elmhurst University faculty member, and art department chair Andrew Sobol are volunteering their time to paint the mural on the north-facing wall of the school's R.A. Faganel Hall athletic facility. The text-heavy design inspirationally states: "Be Bold. Be Elmhurst."

Blanco and Sobol dreamed up a new mural as part of the school's 150th-anniversary celebrations, which officially began last year. A sesquicentennial artwork was a natural idea to them, especially since Spanish-native Blanco has steered his art career more toward mural making, including a "Diversity in Technology" mural that was painted last year in downtown Aurora.

But Blanco and Sobol faced some initial hurdles. The duo's design had to comply with the city of Elmhurst's new mural ordinance, which bars logos and other messages that could be viewed as advertising.

The artists also wanted the school's students and staff to have a say in the final artwork. Four proposed designs were created for the artwork, which stretches 200 feet across and 50 feet high.

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According to Desiree Chen, Elmhurst University's senior director of communications and external relations, the majority of the more than 775 votes cast were in favor of the winning "Be Bold" mural design. Peeking behind the turquoise and white text is the face of a person covered all over in paint.

"We wanted a variety of people to see themselves represented at once," Blanco said. "In reality, it's a student of mine in a photo shoot done by another student of mine."

And since the mural can be seen beyond campus -- especially by passing Metra riders -- the artists strove to create a work for the entire community.

"The thought was to connect the two," said Sobol, of Chicago. "We hope that the message -- not only being a beautiful image -- but that it inspires people."

Depending upon the weather, the artists hope to complete the mural in two weeks. They also want the mural to be a bold new backdrop for family graduation photos tied to Elmhurst University commencement ceremonies on May 21.

"It was kind of like a forgotten site, but it was perfect for us," Blanco said. "We are definitely beautifying the area."

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