

# Mural of yarn created by valley residents unveiled in Palm Desert. So, who is the historic figure depicted?

[Sherry Barkas](#), Palm Springs Desert Sun Published 6:00 a.m. PT April 11, 2019 | Updated 11:02 a.m. PT April 11, 2019

If you have driven past Palm Desert City Hall in recent days, you may have noticed a large mural hanging on the south side of the building, facing Fred Waring Drive.

The mural, part of the “Love Across the USA” project created by artist Olek, took more than 1,000 volunteer hours and about a quarter of a million stitches to create. It was unveiled last week and celebrated Saturday with a gathering of some of its creators outside City Hall.

The bright yellow, green, blue and black mural, titled “Apostle of the Cacti,” depicts the image of Minerva Hamilton Hoyt and coincides with Desert X.

Hoyt, who was born in Durant, Miss., on March 27, 1866, was an activist who founded the International Desert Conservation League and is today credited with the preservation of Joshua Tree National Park, as well as Death Valley and Anza-Borrego parks.

Her work to preserve desert areas encouraged state representatives to establish the three desert parks and eventually convince the federal government to designate more than 800,000 acres of California desert as Joshua Tree National Monument in 1936.



**Artist Olek, kneeling, celebrates the unveiling of a mural of yarn that hangs in front of Palm Desert City Hall with many of the volunteers who helped crochet the art piece, on Saturday, April 6, 2019. The mural is part of Olek's "Love Across the USA" project. (Photo: Sherry Barkas/The Desert Sun)**

“Without her leadership, Joshua Tree National Park might never have become part of the National Park System,” federal officials say.

Hoyt was 79 when she died in 1945 and few today know of her contribution to wildland preservation — a key reason she was selected as a focus of one of 50 planned murals to be created nationwide as part of the “Love Across the USA” project.

Each of the murals — one in every state — will focus on women of history. Five other murals have been completed to date, depicting Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Tubman, Nina Simone, Marian Anderson and Sojourner Truth.

The subject of the murals is kept secret until the work is completed and unveiled.

“It’s not about a billboard to me, it’s about connecting people,” said Olek, who was born in Poland but now resides in New York.

“I didn’t do the work. I supplied the yarn” and the project design, she said. The murals are then created by community volunteers who form a camaraderie through their work, Olek said.

She loves learning about the history of the United States and especially the role women have played and pointed out that Hoyt was fighting for the preservation of Joshua Tree National Park before World War II.

On Friday, Olek visited the park “and I was only there because of her (Hoyt),” she said.

Forty people, ages 13 to 86, participated in creating of the 80 2-foot to 3-foot squares — many of whom had never crocheted before.

Debra Mumm, founder of Create Center for the Arts in Palm Desert, coordinated the effort, which was co-sponsored by the city.

It will remain on exhibit at City Hall about three months.



This mural, made of more than 250,000 stitches of yarn, pays tribute to Minerva Hamilton Hoyt whose activism led the federal government to designate more than 800,000 acres of California desert as Joshua Tree National Monument in 1936. The mural, part of the "Love Across the USA" project, hangs on the south side of Palm Desert City Hall. (Photo: Sherry Barkas/The Desert Sun)

The mural took about six weeks to make, Mumm said.

Many, like Johnathon McCarthy and Steve Hill, had never crocheted before.

McCarthy was the youngest of three generations working on the project. Joining him were his mother, Brigid McCarthy, and grandmother, Pat O'Neil — all of whom learned to crochet while participating in the project.

Johnathon enjoys it so much, he made a shoulder bag for his grandmother which she was showing off on Saturday.

"It's a nice hobby," he said.

Steve Hill, 67, and a member of the Create Center for the Arts board, also learned to crochet for the project.

"I had never stitched a stitch," he said. "I started with a solid color and then did two colors" and ultimately three or four.

He created four of the squares and started about a half-dozen more, then handed them off to other beginners to complete.

"To me, this is a successful project because it brought the community together," he said. "I met a whole new group of people."

The hands of 40 people created the mural, said Mumm, who also learned to crochet through the project.

"It's exciting to be a part of this," said Palm Desert resident Robin Stewart, an avid crocheter who did eight of the squares and has also been working with Desert X at the El Paseo hub.

The biennial Desert X turns the Coachella Valley into an outdoor art museum with more than a dozen pieces on exhibit throughout the valley through April 21.