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Magnificent murals

By BARBARA PIERCE Herald Correspondent
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1 of 6

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HERALD PHOTO BY BARBARA PIERCE Ron Bates with one of the murals he created at Liberty Elementary School. He especially enjoyed the students as they watched him work; some were inspired to want to be an artist like him when they grow up.

The artwork of Port Charlotte resident Ron Bates can be seen throughout Charlotte County. His award-winning cartoons capture the attention of readers on the pages of the *Charlotte Sun* and *Harbor Style Magazine*, his murals energize the walls of Liberty Elementary and Kingsway Elementary schools and enhance many homes and businesses.

The graphic artist has been cartooning since he was 7 years old, influenced by his artist dad. Throughout grade school, he drew cartoons. He was first paid for his murals at the age of 17.

"Whatever anyone asked me to do, I did — from stock cars to murals, to set designs for plays," Bates said.

He has also custom designed, constructed and painted beautiful pieces of furniture that are displayed in libraries throughout the state of Michigan, at Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago, and at the Visual Arts Center in Punta Gorda.

"I live in Florida. I don't boat or fish; I get my recreation from my art," said Bates.

"All of my emotions go into it; it's like therapy."

Self taught, Bates has had no formal training, but developed his unique style and talent on his own.

The likeable and modest Bates is hesitant to mention the many first-place awards he has received on both a local and a national level. He has been given awards for excellence in editorial cartooning from the Charlotte *Sun*, where his cartoons frequently appear, and from prestigious organizations including the Florida Society of Newspaper Editors and the National Newspaper Association.

He is especially proud of the murals he did at Liberty Elementary School. As you enter the building, cheerful and bright murals greet you.

"Seeing them gets you energized," said Noel Olby, mother of students. "They are fabulous; they spruce up the building so much."

On one side of the hallway, Bates created a mural display of "The Seven Habits of Happy Kids," by Sean Covey.

"The school uses this book as a learning tool," Bates said. "I had to recreate the characters and the slogans as they appear in the book — I interpreted it my own way."

After the mural was completed, he sent photos of the mural to Sean Covey.

"He responded to me in 24 hours — he loved what I did!"

The other wall at Liberty is a patriotic mural, with the Statue of Liberty and Mount Rushmore.

"I'm more proud of this, as these are my own characters," said Bates. "I'm happy with the way it turned out."

As Bates worked on the murals, he found it especially rewarding when the students came to watch, giving him compliments like, "You're a good artist," and "I want to be an artist like you when I grow up."

Bates, with wife Donnell and daughter, Casey Nemec, left Grand Rapids, Mich., 12 years ago for Port Charlotte. Nemec owns and operates Studio 7 Center for Creative Studies in Punta Gorda, where Bates teaches a cartooning class for children. For more information, call 941-628-3141.

Photos:

One of the murals that Ron Bates created at Liberty Elementary was based on a patriotic theme. Bates has also created murals at Kingsway Elementary and in homes and businesses in Charlotte County.

HERALD PHOTOS BY BARBARA PIERCE

Meghan Oldby, 7 and Tyler Olby, 10, enjoy Ron Bates' cheerful murals each day at Liberty Elementary. "They get you energized," said mother Noel Olby. "They spruce up the building."

Ron Bates with the mural he created at Liberty Elementary based on the book "7 Habits of Happy Kids" by Sean Covey. "I live in Florida; I don't boat or fish; I get my recreation from my art," said Bates.

As the book "7 Habits of Happy Kids" is used as a teaching tool by Liberty Elementary, Ron Bates based his mural on the book. Author Sean Covey was impressed when he saw photos of the murals.