

COMMUNITY

Welcome to Saint John: Mural reflects city's cultural mosaic



Saint John artist and teacher Sarah Harris has spent her evenings this summer painting a message of welcome at the Reversing Falls. The new mural, which is part of the Marigolds and Murals Project, is inspired by the cultural diversity in Saint John.

Photo: Matthew Daigle/Telegraph-Journal

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Matthew Daigle | Telegraph-Journal

SAINT JOHN • When people visit Saint John, one of the first sites they usually head to is the Reversing Falls. Now, visitors, newcomers and locals alike will be greeted there by a 140-foot welcome sign representing the city's cultural diversity.

The new mural, which is on a wall along the Reversing Falls parking lot below Wolastoq Park, features the phrase "welcome" in several different languages, including Arabic, Ukrainian, Wolastoqiyik, Hindi, French, English, Irish, Mandarin, Hebrew, and Tagalog.

Out of the 140-foot mural, a total of 130 feet of it was done by Saint John artist and teacher Sarah Harris as part of the Murals and Marigolds Project. Harris said while the mural is designed to welcome all to the city, she noted it's also to honour both Ukrainian newcomers and Syrian refugees who have made Canada and Saint John home after fleeing war and violence in their home countries.

"I remember when I was a kid my mum described the difference between Canada and the States to me. She said the States was a melting pot while Canada was a mosaic," Harris said. "Our country was made more beautiful because of all of the distinct cultures. It has stuck with me and I think that concept definitely informed the mural."

The mural was finally completed last week after several months were spent on the project. Harris, who teaches summer school during the day, did her painting in the evenings.

"I'm really hoping that when Ukrainians, or Syrians, or any refugee population drives by, they can really pick up, 'We're happy you're here,'" Harris said of the mural.

The new artwork is part of the Murals and Marigolds Project, which has resulted in five million marigolds and around 200 murals being painted in Saint John in the last 25 years, according to project founder Barry Ogden, who is also a city councillor.

Ogden said Harris did a fabulous job on her mural, and he hopes it can help welcome more people into the community. Attracting more residents is one of city council's priorities, he added.

"I think it's another addition, an attraction to Saint John, especially down at the Reversing Falls [which] is back open again," Ogden said of the mural.

Along with painting the Canadian flag, Harris said she featured Ukrainian embroidery and Syrian ceramics as an inspiration for her mural.

Harris is no stranger to community art projects.

Last August, Harris started designing embroidered "Johner Jackets" to honour standout residents.

With her latest project, Harris said she used "bright colours" to signify cheerfulness and positive messages in her mural to share a message of welcome to all.

- *With files from Sean Mott*

