



Tuesday, August 27, 2013

# Saying thank you to Michigan

Teens at REACH Studio Art Center and guest artists unveil “Thank You, Michigan” mural on East Side building

by Jordan Bradley



A new mural installed on the side of Bancroft Flowers on Lansing's East Side. Jordan Bradley/City Pulse

Tuesday, Aug. 27 — Michigan has been through the wringer. With bankruptcy in Detroit and a mess of an economy statewide, it's clear the state could use a pick-me-up.

So teenagers at REO Town-based REACH Studio Art Center decided to give something back to the city of Lansing with a mural dedicated to the state's offerings. It's hard to miss while traveling eastbound down Michigan Avenue.

Jeana-Dee Allen Rogers, Emily Nott, two guest artists and a team of eager teens set to work to create a piece of art that would inspire conversation and connect the community in Lansing. The mural unveiling Sunday night brought Mayor Virg Bernero and around 100 supportive community members to Lansing's East Side, where it's displayed on the west-facing wall of Bancroft Flowers, 1417 E. Michigan Ave.

“This wall was peeling and kind of gray, and you know, could use some love,” Allen Rogers said. “So we took a pile of teenagers and a pile of people that just have so much love to give to the city of Lansing and we put a mural on it because we wanted a bright spot as you look down from the Capitol.”

Allen Rogers began working with the art community at REACH as an Americorps Vista volunteer three years ago. She is now REACH's education coordinator. REACH Studio Art Center is a nonprofit based in REO Town that offers after-school and summer art programs for children and teens.

Allen Rogers was inspired a year ago when she saw Candy Chang's TED Talk about her “Before I Die...” murals seen around the world and felt that something similar would do good for Lansing. Twelve teens working with REACH staffers and various volunteers spent two days a week working on the mural over the summer. Allen Rogers even put her husband, Dylan Rogers, to work filling in missed spots.

“When (Jeana-Dee) had this idea to do this chalkboard mural, the idea was that we would be stewards of this wall and make sure it's maintained,” Dylan Rogers said. “The whole idea is just to create a dialogue between Lansing residents about what they love about their city and their state.”

Abbey Hoffman, one of the guest artists, was responsible for creating the stencils used for the Lower and Upper peninsulas and the flower stems.

“When I pictured the mural, I pictured just some white text and a bunch of people writing in chalk, but thanks to the REACH team and all of our brainstorming, I have to say that it turned out more incredible than I ever could have imagined,” Hoffman said.

During the unveiling, each student told the crowd what they had learned while working on the project and what they loved about the mural. Though their individual answers varied, they all enjoyed the community and teamwork aspects of the project. Before the yellow tape was cut to officially introduce “Thank You, Michigan,” each student was given a yellow rose signifying friendship courtesy of Bancroft Flowers.

Ruth Leyrer, owner of Bancroft Flowers for the past 11 years, donated the large wall space for the mural.

“For the students to come out and paint these beautiful flowers on the wall,” she said, “it just makes me smile every morning I walk in the door.”

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