

Artists sign up for Roosman mural restoration through March



By Michael Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The restoration of Arne Roosman's mural depicting the history of Bancroft and area since the arrival of the settlers is proceeding smoothly, with artists signing up to paint segments of the mural through March and beyond (before the summer) inside the gallery at A Place for the Arts. The actual work will be done throughout July and August. Gail Crosmaz, marketing and communications representative with APFTA, comments on this ongoing process. She has also created a Facebook page called "Community Mural Revitalization" to share updates on the mural as it progresses through the summer. It can be found at www.facebook.com/community-mural-revitalization. For more information or to sign up to contribute to the mural, contact Crosmaz at wisdomdrumsinternational@gmail.com.

The owner of the Whitfield building, Burke Chamberlin asked APFTA to facilitate this update of Roosman's mural that adorns the west side of the building, as it was disintegrating. The restoration is due to be done by the end of the summer with a big presentation that includes politicians, First Nations and Roosman at the unveiling. In addition to Chamberlin, the other confirmed sponsors are APFTA, the Algonquin Arts Council, Wisdom Drums International and ItStix Signs. Several other sponsors were to be confirmed as Feb. 24.

In a Jan. 5 media release, Crosmaz said APFTA is doing this restoration as a two-month summer event in their Annex Gallery and they were calling all artists in the community to help repaint parts of the mural.

"As a public event, it will encourage more visitors to our little corner of Bancroft and promote the vast creativity of our extended artistic community. We will create a daily timeline when artists are available to be in the gallery to paint their original design segment," she says.

APFTA director Debbie Christie asked Crosmaz to do the restoration, but as she can no longer climb scaffolding due to her age, she's organizing it instead. Crosmaz told Bancroft This Week that she decided to make it a community mural project instead of just the artists in the gallery itself, and is also inviting First Nations artists, making it a reconciliation theme too. There will also be an honour plaque next to the mural, listing all the artists and sponsors.

The mural's proposed redesign will overlay two giant dragonflies and a firefly as a basis for the collage design, according to Crosmaz. She said they'll be keeping some sections of the original mural as the background as they develop segments of the design with the new art. She said they invited Algonquin First Nations artists to create representations of Algonquin teachings in art form, from their Wawatesi (firefly in Algonquin) Cultural Discovery Project along the river's edge. The giant firefly in the middle of the mural will be reserved for First Nations' teaching and history, according to Crosmaz.

Coe Hill based Roosman is a lithographer, designer of books, stage sets and murals, illustrator and painter, who has been a renowned and award-winning freelance artist for over 25 years. His mural was unveiled back in 2014, and he has given his blessing for its restoration this summer.

Through the month of March, artists will sign up to paint specific segments of the mural inside the APFTA gallery this summer. Crosmaz revealed that for the restoration, they'll bring inside half of the 11 (4' by 8') mural panels at a time, set up on easels to accommodate the creative process. As to why it'll be done inside, she said it's difficult to work on art outside on west walls as it gets too hot after noon and it can't be done wet because it's on storyboard so it has to be totally dry. Crosmaz said that this initiative is about bringing the community together so they can watch the restoration happening in real time during the summer.

Crosmaz told Bancroft This Week on Feb. 24 that they broke the mural restoration into sections and approximate sizes so artists who sign up know what they're committing to so they can plan the scene they want to do on the mural. The themes are natural history, pre-colonial history, wildlife habitat, wildlife and scenic sites, although they ask for no controversial or political statements.

?So, this section will be in the section of a leaf but it could be a waterfall or a cliff or a view from Eagles Nest. Same with the firefly and the dragonfly. Earth tones or warm colours for the former and cool coolers for the latter. So, it'll pop out. Because from a distance, all you'll see are the colours and then when you get close, you'll see the individual scenes,? she says.

Crosmaz says she'll be there in person at the gallery on Saturdays throughout March, except March 8, to answer any questions people have on the mural restoration. She emphasizes that while the sign-up starts in March, it will continue into the summer until the spots for are all filled.

?Some people might not show up until July or August. People come for the summer they have cottages and find out what's going on and they're like ?I want to paint a section.' So, it'll be ongoing until it's finished,? she says.

Crosmaz says she'll be creating a tour guide book of the project, featuring each section as it's being done with the map of each segment with the artists name and what they created. A cinematographer will also be filming a mini-documentary of the process.

Crosmaz reiterated they'll also be saving the firefly in the centre for the Algonquin First Nations artists in the Wawatesi Cultural Discovery Project, and that the surrounding areas will be saved for other Indigenous peoples that may contribute to see what they come up with, if they end up doing so.

In addition to the painting that will restore the damaged sections of the mural, they'll also be cleaning and varnishing the sections that are undamaged, to bring them back to their former glory.

?Not everybody needs to be an artist. We need helpers too. I don't want to have to do it all myself, but I will,? she says with a laugh.

All paint and supplies will be provided to the participating artists. Crosmaz says they'll be using high quality exterior house paint and

then cover it with three coats of diamond coat exterior varnish with UV protection so the colours don't fade.

?And that'll go over the entire mural even the areas we don't paint but just clean and spruce up. That'll protect them and make the colours pop a bit more too,? she says.

Crosmaz says that while they're only painting over the damaged areas, they won't know until they sand it what size that area will be but they can expand the new areas to compensate if necessary.

?We'll expand with another leaf to fill in that area or if it's small we can touch it up as well. It's winging it and going with the flow and having fun. Because it's multi-generational, because we're inviting the high school kids and people of all ages and the Indigenous community. We're all coming together and sharing our love of the area and what draws us to it and what we love and what we believe in, and just coming together as a family,? she says.

During the summer, as the artists work on their sections of the mural, the APFTA will have two big sliding doors at the front of their establishment opened to the outside so passersby can watch them work on any given day and the artists can promote themselves and their work at the same time.

Crosmaz tells Bancroft This Week that she gets such joy out of creating these events, that she's like a child again.

?The energy here [at APFTA] is already great and then you bring in all these people with fresh ideas,? she says. ?It's going to be a lot of fun!?