



Roberta Little

A child works on the mural in the photo above. Below, Casey Spacht of Terre Hill takes a photo of the details in the completed mural Thursday night.



Suzette Wenger / Staff

YIC residents look within to create uplifting visual

BY TAYLOR BUNDY
Staff Writer

Roberta Little is a miracle worker.

She and other volunteers from ShooFlyMoonPie, an organization committed to enriching the community through art, dedicated a mural made by teens at Lancaster County Youth Intervention Center to the center Thursday.

The project, titled The Miracle Mural, is a collaborative effort of residents at both the YIC shelter and detention center. The young artists looked toward "miracles" in their own lives as inspiration for the project.

Little founded ShooFlyMoonPie about a year ago to "create a bridge" between Mississippi Gulf Coast and southeastern Pennsylvania artists.

"I wanted to uplift the people affected by Katrina," said Little, who lived on the Gulf Coast in Mississippi until 2005.

"Many of the artists down there — many of my friends — lost their studios, their income and their art," Little said.

Last June, Little and volunteers with ShooFlyMoonPie — which derives its name from Penn-

sylvania's shoofly pie and Mississippi's moon pie, a treat popular around Mardi Gras — invited Mississippi artist Bill Myers to work in the Lancaster area.

Little said Myers decided he wanted to work with kids at a detention center.

At YIC, he and teen artists created a mural that now adorns the entryway of the center.

"The volunteers got so involved that we decided we couldn't stop," Little said. "We felt it was so important to keep going, because art is such a healer. I know from personal experience how healing it is to express yourself artistically."

So she founded ArtSmart, a continuing art program at YIC, and in February she contracted Lancaster muralist Elisabeth Weaver to work with the young residents.

Scott Feifer, a teacher at Hempfield Middle School and volunteer at YIC, led the teens through a writing circle in which they used Walt Whitman's poem "Miracles" as inspiration for their own writing.

"They love him," Little said. "We were lucky

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enough to have Scott come on board and collaborate with this project."

According to Little, the YIC residents wrote a collaborative poem with Feifer's assistance and used the piece as creative fodder for the mural.

"We brainstormed with them and took steps to help them create visual images about the words," Little said. "Sometimes you don't find it easy to express yourself that way."

The group met Thursday nights starting in February and finished the project last week.

Traci Lutz, a volunteer at YIC, acted as a team leader

for the shelter section of the center.

Cindy Moyer, former head of the art department at Hempfield High School, worked with the youth at the YIC detention center.

Little said the mural, which stands 5 feet high and 11 feet wide, will be rotated between the shelter and the detention center "so all the kids will have experience seeing it."

"Part of our goal is to fill up the walls at the Youth Intervention Center with positive images created by the residents there," Little said. "We are excited about (the mural) because of the message it carries. It's very impactful with both its message in writing and visually," she said.

Little said that because the

YIC is a temporary residence, she and other volunteers did not work with the same group of kids throughout the entire project.

But what did last were the memories.

Little said one young man had been drawing pancakes with syrup and butter on top when Little approached him and said, "You must really like breakfast."

According to Little, the boy looked up and said, "No, my miracle is three meals a day."

"When kids are telling you about their miracles, and when they're in a situation that is less than warm and cozy — less than what you would hope for them — and they can reach out and say,

'Guess what, I know a little more about miracles than you,' it isn't so much that we're impacting them, but that we volunteers get so much more from it," Little said.

The founder of ShooFly-MoonPie said that during the project she took hundreds of photos — close-ups of the residents' hands at work on the mural. She has another art project for the future, one involving the photographs.

"It's just been such a beautiful collaborative effort, and I'm so proud of them," Little said of the mural project and the young artists who made "the miracle happen."

"It really was a wonderful learning experience for all of us."

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