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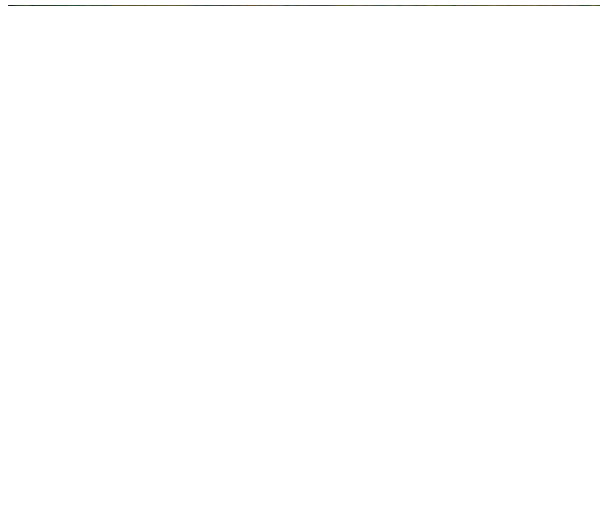
Public art piece in First Ward seeks to promote inclusiveness

By [RYAN ZUNNER \(/PEOPLE/RYAN-ZUNNER\)](/PEOPLE/RYAN-ZUNNER) • AUG 26, 2020

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A new mural has been unveiled today in the Old First Ward which combines symbolic elements of the LGBTQ+ and Native American communities.



https://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wbfo/files/styles/x_large/public/202008/mural.jpg

The mural took several months to complete, and is painted on a National Fuel substation on Mackinaw and Alabama Streets in the Old First Ward.

CREDIT RYAN ZUNNER / WBFO NEWS

The project was part of the Western New York Land Conservancy's efforts to revitalize the unused DL & W railway corridor. Art teacher Chris Kameck, whose students at the Old First Ward Community Center helped design and paint the mural, said the public art piece is a reflection their efforts to unite the South Buffalo community.

"I engaged, and I listened to my students concerns and needs as I created the design that would be the visual representation of their needs and wants. We then took that color pencil design and got to work," Kameck said. "We got our hands dirty, most times covered in paint. We learned new skills, we learned new materials, but most importantly, we learned about each other."

The mural was placed onto a National Fuel substation, and was paid for through a grant from Blue Cross Blue Shields's Blue Fund.

Jordan Johnson, 14, was one of over 20 students involved in the mural project. She says public art with symbols like these are important to promote inclusiveness in diversified communities.


"This [mural] was meant to bring peace, and I'm hoping it stays that way because homophobes and racists are so quick to throw slurs," said Johnson. "What I don't concept about racism, sexism, and homophobia, is deep down we're all human, so why does it matter anyways?"


Johnson, who is bisexual, said the project has helped her feel more comfortable in being herself.

"I often hear slurs, and told that I'm in the wrong, but it's simply not a choice," Johnson said. "This project made me attend the [Old First Ward Community Center] quite frequently, so I could bring some peace to this terrible world we live in. But at the end of the day, why does being gay or of color change how other people see you? I truly hope this mural will leave you thinking."

Nancy Smith, executive director of the Land Conservancy, said this project is just the start of a larger vision that will be a part of The Riverline, an elevated greenway seeking to connect Buffalo's urban communities to the waterfront and nature.


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