

Canada 150 mural fostering deeper community ties in Hunt Club, Riverside Park

'It's a blending of cultures': volunteer

NEWS

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Hunt Club resident Ijeoma Udechukwu (left) and Centrepointe resident Aliaa Shoaib volunteer their time to paint a Canada 150-themed mural for the exterior of the Hunt Club-Riverside Park Community Centre. The artwork will be unveiled in October. - Erin McCracken/Metroland

As patrons open the door to the Hunt Club-Riverside Park Community Centre, their steps slow as they take in the unique sight that greets them.

Three days a week, the lobby of the community hub is transformed into an art studio, where Hunt Club artist Claudia Salguero moves from table to table where her volunteer painters, most of whom were strangers to one another just a few short weeks ago, transform blank canvases into works of colourful art.

Together, they are creating a mural that celebrates diversity and Canada's 150th birthday.

Since Salguero was awarded \$14,000 via the AOE Arts Council to take part in a Neighbourhood Arts 150

"For example, that is going to be China, that is Afghanistan, Africa. That is Turkey," Salguero says, pointing out each colourful image.

"We chose something that is common to many of them," she said, noting the mural will reflect about a dozen regions and countries around the world, from Europe to Asia and Africa to the Middle East.

There will also be images reflecting nature. As well, one piece will resemble a feather in recognition of Canada's Indigenous peoples, while another will represent early settlers.

Simmy Ahluwalia became involved by taking photos during the early painting sessions, but quickly became hooked and now paints three days a week.

"I love it," the Hunt Club resident said. "It's cultural diversity, and as I'm painting it, I'm seeing the diversity. It's a blending of cultures."

While the volunteers are largely from Hunt Club and Riverside Park, others who heard about the initiative, have been coming in from Cumberland, Kanata and Nepean.

"I wanted to be part of this amazing project," said Aliaa Shoaib, a Centrepointe-area resident who has been involved since the beginning. "You get to meet new people, and you get to do art."

The University of Ottawa biology student has discovered a new passion and creative outlet.

"That is something I've always wanted to do," Shoaib said, adding the mural's theme also offers an important message. "I love it. It just combines every culture and every culture."

The project has also received the support of the Hunt Club Community Organization and the Riverside Park Community and Recreation Association, which put out a call for volunteers, as did the South-East Ottawa Community Health Centre, which has a satellite office at the centre. River Coun. Riley Brockington, whose ward includes the centre, has also supported the mural, said Salguero.

Painting will wrap up by the end of August and the mural will be unveiled during a community celebration in October.