

Neighbourhood 150 Arts project a success in bringing communities together

Hunt Club artist part of community celebration

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Claudia Salguero sings at the Wabano Centre on Nov. 23, at the closing event of the AOE Arts Council Neighbour Arts 150 project. - Alexandra Mazur / Metroland

Claudia Salguero invited the crowd of artists and volunteers at the Wabano Centre on Nov. 23, to sing along with her as she strummed her guitar.

It was a fitting end to the AOE Arts Council Neighbourhood Arts 150 project, which consisted of a burst of interactive art projects hosted since April in neighbourhoods outside of the city-centre.

Salguero, a Hunt Club resident, spearheaded the creation of a large and vibrantly coloured mural that had more than 40 pairs of hands involved in its creation. Since May, the volunteers had been meeting three times a week at the Hunt Club-Riverside Park Community Centre, where the mural will be mounted.

"The purpose of the project was to bring community together," said Salguero, as well as to celebrate the diversity of the area. She said the process made her feel as if she had had new family members from both the Hunt Club and Riverside Park communities. "We built community, we now have new friends, we learned so much from each other," said Salguero. "It was a long conversation held over months."

Svetlana Najmi, originally from Belarus, was one of the volunteers that helped with the mural. She came to the Wabano Centre Thursday evening to support Salguero. A mother of two young boys, Najmi said that her mother-in law had told her about the mural project, so she took her children with her to join in.

"I enjoyed the team work most of all," said Najmi. "Some people understood who could do straight lines better, or curves, somebody was good at colouring, or mixing the paints. It was so wonderful, I made so many friends that I didn't know were in the same neighbourhood," said Najmi.

Of the 12 installations, 10 are up or have been completed, but Salguero's mural was one of two that were not up for display yet. Although Salguero said the mural is painted, the complexity of the project and as the age of the community center building have delayed the unveiling.

Salguero was originally awarded \$14,000 for the mural, but the complexity of the project made it more difficult to install on the community centre than originally anticipated.

River Coun. Riley Brockington stepped in with extra cash from from a cash-in-lieu account, which basically takes money from developments in the ward, and saves them for parks and recreation projects. It will cost \$13,000 for the installation of the mural, which, according to Brockington, will be installed sometime next week.

The other project that just missed the deadline was unveiled at the closing event on Thursday evening. A collection of 100 clay tiles lay on a large table, acted as a centrepiece for the event. The tiles that will eventually be installed in Vanier's Overbrook neighbourhood were designed by members of the Minwaashin Lodge Aboriginal community, under the guidance of Gatineau artist Beth McCubbin.

Other projects included the Rag and Bone Puppet theatre company, that performed staged story readings in 18 locations across Ottawa, and Think!theatre, who invited people to come to the Wellington West and Bayshore areas to experience *Bread*, an interactive theatre experience based around the baking of bread.

According to Christiane Doherty, director of communications at the AOE, the point of the Neighbourhood Arts 150 was to give access to communities in Ottawa that are underserved in art.

"We learned that community engaged in arts can have an impact on communities, and arts can build stronger communities." Doherty added that the AOE is looking to continue that kind of engagement in the city.

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