

HOMETOWN Art

By McKenzie Kramer

Ever since the very first issue of Visit McCall Magazine, there has been one elusive story I've wanted to feature. Every year when we map out the editorial content and plan for upcoming magazines, the city bus shelters always top the list.

For whatever reason, our timing has ALWAYS been off: The artwork will be suddenly swapped out, and another opportunity to tell this beautiful story is missed.



But not this year! I learned this was a year for updating the bus stop artwork in that magical small-town way where a casual conversation with neighbors led to a chance mention about art class and a project for school that would end up getting printed on the bus shelters. Boom. This was the chance I had been waiting for – a chance to not just write about the finished product, but actually watch a bit of the process unfold.

I had always known that McCall's five bus shelters were designed by students. What I didn't fully understand was the immense amount of planning, collaboration, and time it takes to get each print finalized and installed and the team of supportive and enthusiastic people who make it all happen. As part of the City of McCall's "Hometown Art" initiative, the bus shelters, along with the murals that line Railroad Avenue, are spearheaded by some amazing teachers at our local public schools who act as guides for the students designing the finished product.

HOW THE ART GOT ITS START

The first formal public art program in the City of McCall came with the inception of the Hometown Art initiative. With the creation of the Public Art Advisory Committee in 2012, the stage was set for a collaboration. "One of the first opportunities we identified was the bus shelters," says Delta James, City of McCall Economic

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Development Planner and Liaison to the Public Art Advisory Committee. The project brought in participation from local schools to create the artwork and facilitate art education programming at all grade levels.

As a member of the Public Art Advisory Committee, McCall-Donnelly High School art teacher, Cynthia Dittmer has worked to create and guide the Hometown Art collaboration with the City of McCall. With the help of grant money from various sources, she has shared financial resources and organized the involvement of other teachers from each of the district schools. "During the first year, we worked with grant money from the McCall-Donnelly Education Foundation. My Advanced Art class and Alison Foudy's high school English students mentored elementary school students in understanding the importance of public art, creating their own public art piece and writing reflections about the work they created," says Dittmer. "At the end of the school year, we hosted a community art show and chose the best of the work to photograph and turn into the final bus shelter pieces."

That was year one. Since then, the program has flexed and adapted while continuing to bring unique artwork to the community. Five bus shelters are updated every four years while the murals on Railroad Avenue, which are also part of the overall Hometown Art program, are updated every three years.

"The overarching theme of our program has always been 'Hometown Art,'" says Dittmer, "and this offers a positive community and geographical context while providing flexibility for individual teachers and students to interpret." And the theme has always produced wonderful results. "We see that when creativity and inspiration connect students to a sense of purpose and place in the community, exciting things



happen,” says Dittmer. This year, Kim Hamilton’s second graders at Barbara Morgan elementary school worked with a backpacking theme, the middle school chose to highlight McCall icons and what their community means to them, while the high school worked to create visual representations that support mental wellness.

“The overarching theme of the entire program is ‘Hometown Art,’” says Dittmer, “but that provides a lot of flexibility for individual teachers and students to interpret that theme.” This year, the elementary school worked with a backpacking theme, the middle school chose to highlight McCall icons and what their community means to them, while the high school worked to create visual representations of mental wellness.

ART IN ACTION

I had the opportunity to visit two classes as they worked on the final artwork pieces for the bus shelters – a middle school class and the advanced art class at the high school.

The middle school art classes chose to work their theme of community into a Mandala design with icons representing the things they love the most about McCall. “We want to celebrate everyone’s voices,” says Jared Hopkins, Art Teacher at Payette Lakes Middle School. “Every artist has to be represented in the

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final product.” To design the Mandalas, each student contributed two pieces that were then incorporated into the finished arrangement.

On the day I visited, students were working on the first iteration of their final Mandala design as a class. As with many group settings, it started slow, with lots of encouragement and a few suggestions from Mr. Hopkins. Once a few pieces were placed on the board, the creativity started flowing and each student had a turn trying different placements and arrangements. “It is all about balancing shapes, sizes, color tones, and imagery,” says Hopkins. I left class that day impressed with not just the artwork, but also the collaborative approach and the thoughtful placement given to each piece to create the final design.

At the high school, the same thoughtfulness was on display as students worked to complete two different elements that would combine together on a single, unified bus shelter design. All of the pieces reflect their chosen theme of mental wellness, something McKeeley Meske, a senior at McCall-Donnelly High School and project contributor, says was important to the entire class. “With the pandemic lock down last year and the things the community went through it was something we really wanted to talk about and highlight,” she says.

The first part of the design features puzzle pieces by more than 100 student artists that fit together to symbolize the significance of every individual, the importance of connection, and of a healthy mindset. Each student chose something uplifting to their own mental health or the health of others and painted, drew, or block print stamped their images onto puzzle piece shape. The puzzle pieces were then scanned and cleaned up in Photoshop

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with the help of Business Technology teacher, Shelly Chamberlain, and some hard-working student aides.

The second part of the design drew inspiration from street artist, Chip Thomas' thought-provoking work. Student artists painted motivational text across one another's backs and arms as 'human canvases.' The painted subjects were then photographed and isolated to a transparent background. "The idea was to show the importance of kindness and respect across differing social, philosophical, and age groups within a community," says Dittmer. "Students connected strongly with the idea that we are all more than 'labels' and hoped to create a bus stop that invited passers-by to interact with not only a conceptual aspect but with the physical design of light and color."

And the finished product is something wholly unique. This year, four bus shelters were reprinted with artwork that will showcase the talent of our community for the next several years. Along with the unique artwork, "this project really helps build community and articulate what is unique about our community," says James. "It is one of those things that is really visible to residents and visitors that defines us as a town which is why the theme of 'Hometown Arts' fits so well."



TOUR MCCALL'S PUBLIC ART

The Hometown Art project is just one of many public art efforts underway in McCall. Explore all of the public art installations that celebrate our unique community:

(New in 2021) Mill Whistle This installation is meant to give back to McCall the sound that embodied the character and livelihood of the town for decades with the revival of the lumber mill steam whistle. It is meant to create a new "village" tradition of blowing the whistle each year both as a honoring of the past and also a distinct celebration of the present.

(New in 2021) "Our Confluence" A celebration of the iconic local waterways of the South Fork and Main Salmon River in this functional concrete and metal bench installed at the corner of Lenora Street and 2nd Street at the heart of McCall.

"Shortcut" Located at the McCall Public Library

Owl Wood carving donated by high school senior. Located at McCall Public Library.

Centennial Park A collection of mosaics celebrating McCall's 100th anniversary. Located at the corner of Third Street and Railroad Ave.

Railroad Murals Part of the Hometown Art series. Located on Railroad Ave.

"Taking Flight" Located at the corner of Pine Street and Railroad Ave.

"Going to School" Located at Brown Park.

"Cairns: A Natural Marker" Located at several entrances to bike and pedestrian pathways.

"Stalactites" Located at Legacy Park.

Legacy Park Unique benches, pavers and light pole accents throughout Legacy Park in downtown McCall.

"The Bearing Wall" Located at Art Roberts Park.

CCC Worker Memorial Located on the grounds of the Central Idaho Historical Museum.

"The Waves of Payette Lake" Steel railings located at Rotary Park.

"Seasons" Located on the four corners of the Lardo Bridge near Shore Lodge.

"Wings Over McCall" Located at the intersection of Deinhard Lane and Highway 55.

FOR A MAP OF MCCALL'S PUBLIC ART, VISIT WWW.MCCALL.ID.US/PUBLIC-ART

