

Canadian wilds will bring hopeful message to Yonge Street



The beauty of Canada's untamed wilderness has inspired generations of artists, including Vicki Carruthers.

Now, the Aurora-based artist, who is renowned for her interpretations on the beauty of nature, hopes her work will inspire fellow residents as she lends her work to a new downtown mural.

Ms. Carruthers' work will this year grace a municipally-owned retaining wall on Yonge Street, steps north of Kennedy Street, just in front of Chartwell Park Place retirement residence.

The mural is part of a vision first proposed to Council by Mayor Tom Mrakas with an aim to transform otherwise plain walls of concrete into colourful showcases of public art designed to inspire and draw people back to Yonge Street.

"I have been an artist my whole life and you reach a point where you start to think about other opportunities and other dreams," says Ms. Carruthers. "I always wanted to have an outside permanent installation somewhere and when this came up, I thought what a better place to do it than your own hometown? A great opportunity right here in Aurora."

The mural was originally set to be installed less than a block north of the Park Place site, but maintenance work caused the Town to look for alternative locations. In a twist of fate, the new and final location just happens to be directly across the street from her husband's business, Carruthers Financial.

"My art is all about spreading joy and happiness and living each day," says Ms. Carruthers. "The painting's title is Stay Strong, so you believe in yourself and never give up on your dreams. That is kind of my life-long inspiration. I have worked hard, I've struggled, and now things are coming to me with just never giving up."

Vicki Carruthers' work is based on landscape, shape and colour. Her joy is Georgian Bay and she finds particular inspiration in the trees, water and sky. To her, it is Canada and this love is very much reflected in what will become an Aurora landmark this summer.

She learned art at her grandmother's knee and picked up her first paintbrush at the age of four.

She pursued her passion through university and an art show about 20 years ago where everything sold the first night inspired her to not only keep going with her passion but propel her forward.

‘It is humbling,’ says Ms. Carruthers on being chosen to be a part of the mural program. ‘It’s such a joy and something I never actually expected. You might see a beautiful mural when you’re travelling and say, ‘Wow, I love that!’ but this is very humbling and it will be very exciting to see it come to life.’

This enthusiasm is shared by Mayor Mrakas who says revitalization efforts like these are an ‘exciting’ time for the downtown core.

‘We’re excited that not only is the mural project going to be happening, but we’ll have our first one up and done in the spring and it will also be by what I believe is one of our most famous artists in the Town of Aurora,’ he said. ‘I’ve seen [the rendering of the mural] so many times and it just pops at you. To me, it shows light, sun, enjoyment. I think it makes you happy and that is a good feeling to have on a wall in the downtown and as people are walking by, to have those kinds of feelings when they see something.’

In the next few weeks, the mural will be translated into a 35 x 40 foot vinyl wrap that will be applied directly to the retaining wall once weather allows for it. It has to be at least 15 degrees outside for that to happen, so the Town is looking at an installation in May or June with a community celebration dedicating it in the summertime.

The budget for the mural stands at \$10,000 with half coming from the Town of Aurora and the other half from Enbridge Gas’ community grant program.

By Brock Weir
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