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DISCOVER
SWVA LIVING
SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA'S PREMIER LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE
THE ROANOKE TIMES

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Artist Jon Murrill has created murals in Southeast Roanoke that map out the love residents have for their neighborhoods



story by
LUKE WEIR

photography by
SCOTT P. YATES

Street Art Jon Murrill's mural at the Roanoke River Greenway's 9th Street overpass includes street names so locals can find where they live.

art

UNDER THE BRIDGE

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JON MURRILL PERCHES ATOP A LADDER, SHADED UNDER A bridge over the Roanoke River in the rising heat of a July morning, reaching to paint the highest stretch of his 13-foot-tall canvas.

A wall of concrete 40 feet across and more than twice as tall as the artist is another of Murrill's mural projects. What was once an unremarkable gray slab beside the Roanoke River Greenway is coated in layers of green, purple and black paint.

"That's just the silhouette, there's going to be a lot more color and imagery," Murrill said, still brushing birds onto his canvas. "These are going to be cedar waxwings. Cedar waxwings symbolize community."

As bicyclists and walkers with strollers passed beneath 9th Street Southeast, Murrill, from atop his ladder, said the city commissioned him to beautify a pair of bridge underpasses

"There's going to be the three waxwings transitioning into a really large nest perched over on that ledge ... and there'll be eggs in the nest, to symbolize rebirth," he said, pointing to the other side of his massive sketch. "It's going to seem like it's a part of this specific environment, as if the mural is part of the



Community Effort Artist Jon Murrill guides volunteer painting assistants. Roanoke commissioned Murrill to beautify a pair of bridge underpasses.



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scenery.”

On the ground armed with brushes are two of Murrill’s former art students, recent Patrick Henry High School graduates.

“These are all the streets of Southeast Roanoke. ... It’s meant to be an interactive element of the mural,” Murrill said. “We wanted to really represent the streets from the community that uses this area of the greenway. People can come up and find their street ... kids can point to where they live.”

Altogether, it’s taken Murrill a bit more than a month of work to finish, with the help of local volunteers coordinated by I Heart SE, a neighborhood community group founded by Sunni Purviance.

“Our group is really just about spreading love for Southeast,” she said, wearing a green tie-dye I Heart SE T-shirt. “We do a lot of litter cleanups, and we do painting jobs, mural work, activities and events that bring people together in our community, and get to know their neighbors.”

The mural beneath 9th Street, along with two others soon to be painted

“We’re really trying to show a little bit of love to the streets we care about.”

JON MURRILL

under 13th Street, is a gift to the Southeast neighborhood, she said. Murrill, a Roanoke native and Vinton resident, said his projects for the city are a good change of pace from past mural work.

“Murals are something that I’ve been doing for about 18 months, and it’s been



A Work of Heart Benson Pietrzyk (above), one of Murrill’s former students at Patrick Henry High School, and Sunni Purviance, founder of the I Heart SE neighborhood group, help to complete the mural over the summer.



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really an amazing challenge, but also something I've really enjoyed," Murrill said.

He listed examples of his other work: Twisted Track Brewpub, Sidecar and French Farmhouse downtown; and Local Roots in Grandin Village.

For the greenway mural process, he started with a few sketches, then made a digital concept, splitting that into a grid system to upscale with chalk outlines on his concrete canvas. From there, he added shades of paint, starting with base layers and adding detail on top.

It's one project on a growing list funded by Roanoke's Art Matters program, part of the city's Year of the Artist campaign, celebrating artists as leaders.

"The overall goal is to just bring joy to the diverse community we have here on the Greenway," Murrill said. "We're really trying to show a little bit of love to



Small Touches, Big Impact

Bicyclists and walkers pass as Spence Robertson, a member of the I Heart SE neighborhood group, helps paint.

ONLINE

Find out more about Jon Murrill's work at murrillart.com.

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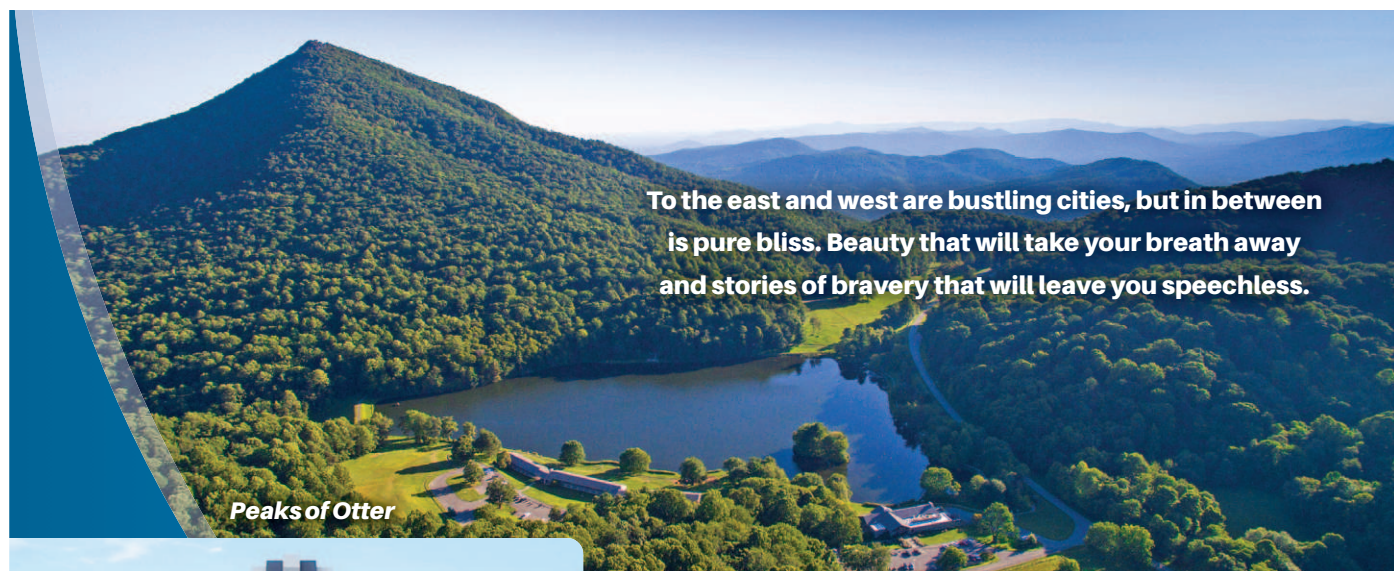
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Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's Samantha Figgins, photo by Dario Calmese



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