

# Transit Shelter Transforms

written by *Kianna Price Marshall* Local art makes two new bus shelters come to life with color and personality.



The bus shelters in Melrose and Orange Avenue neighborhoods now also serve as public art.

**P**roviding more than just shelter from the weather, two new bus shelters in Northwest Roanoke provide hope, pride and visibility to a community rich with culture, determination, innovation, love and brilliance. The bus shelters not only improve the public transportation experience but they also serve as public art celebrating the diversity and pride of the Melrose and Orange Avenue neighborhoods.

These shelters were designed by local artist Daniel Kuehl and fabricated by Renaissance Lighting and Metal Furniture located in NE Roanoke. Kuehl, an art teacher at Patrick Henry High School, submitted his proposal to the Roanoke Arts Commission. He was then selected by a community selection panel in spring of 2021 to design the bus shelters.

The project, titled "Community," was a collaborative partnership between the Roanoke Arts Commission, Valley Metro, HUD Community Resources and residents and stakeholders of MOTA (Melrose-Orange

Target Area). The two bus shelters along Melrose Avenue offered an opportunity for the community to present the character and identity of the area. It was Kuehl's goal to do something that reflected the community and depicted more than the typical iconic Roanoke landmarks like the Mill Mountain Star, Dr. Pepper Neon Sign and the Blue Ridge Parkway. It was important to him and the selection committee to highlight NW residents of various generations making a difference within the neighborhood by their daily actions.

The 24 portraits featured on the bus shelter panels are a result of outreach and recommendations. Every day neighbors, community workers, business owners, students and advocates that make up the fabric of NW Roanoke.

"I wanted to celebrate the community and not just the big shots," Kuehl says.

After several months of recruiting members of the community to take part in this public art project, Kuehl and the selection committee were pleased with their finalized list as it reflected a variety of NW neighbors. Members

who have lived in the community for most of their lives, like Toya Jones, a small business owner, and Nicole Ross, a community worker; everyday people like "Mr. Harry," who takes pride in growing fresh produce in his NW urban garden; Carolyn Ferguson who once relied on public transit daily; and community leaders such as Dr. Brenda Hale, NAACP Roanoke Branch President. The art panels also honor members of the community who have passed on such as community advocate and leader Estelle Macadden and William Fleming graduate Arnez Kirtley, Class of 2018.

Kuehl says, "I wanted for the people of this community to shine."

Kuehl used a picture of each individual and turned them into a line drawing. As the designer of

the imaging he turned his drawings over to Renaissance Lighting and Metal Furniture, who then fabricated the bus shelters by laser cutting the images. The entire process took a year from the idea conception to when he turned in his drawings. About four months later the drawings came to life, and the shelters were revealed and dedicated in August 2022.

Robyn Mitchell, an entrepreneur and community advocate, attended the dedication and was featured on the bus shelter. "Seeing the bus stops for the first time, I felt a wide range of emotions. Seeing people who have impacted our community, alongside people that we've lost, coupled with everyday people who make NW Roanoke what it is — and then here I am looking at myself reflected in that piece. [I felt] speechless, humbled, appreciative — floored."

Mitchell isn't the only one who is appreciative of the new public art. Neighbors agree the addition is a positive step in the right direction.

"These installations symbolize hope and love for community. We are witnessing NW transform right before our eyes," Mitchell adds. ☆



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