

Jazz Alley mural celebrates Fort Collins music

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Written by
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Muralist Terry McNerney has turned a once-blighted Fort Collins alleyway into a celebration of Fort Collins music and history, as well as a tribute to popular icons of the 20th and early 21st century.

"My goal was to make it a focused place, like a destination point, so if you come hear I want you to spend time going, wow, did you see the cat in the corner; gee, there's Bob Dylan; there's the parrot. I want people to take time," McNerney said Friday at the public unveiling of Jazz Alley, a project commissioned by the Bohemian Foundation adjacent to its building at 262 E. Mountain Ave. in Old Town.

The 1,500-square-foot mural, against the wall of the Fort Collins Food Co-Op, features a mixture of musicians, celebrities and pop icons - from Marilyn Monroe to the Beatles to Albert Einstein - watching a band made up of Fort Collins musicians. Ten local musicians are featured in the mural, including Hazel Miller, Mark Sloniker, John Magine, Cary Morin and Liz Barnez.

Also scattered in the crowd are important Fort Collins historical figures such as Col. William O. Collins, the city's namesake; developer Gene Mitchell, and former Colorado State University football coach Sonny Lubick.

Also featured is Jerry Overstreet, an Old Town fixture known for almost two decades as Old Town Jerry.

"Terry came up me and said, I need a picture of you because Pat wants you to be in a mural," said Overstreet, 81, who attended Friday's dedication of the mural.

All the people featured in the mural were chosen by Pat Stryker, the Fort Collins philanthropist who runs the Bohemian Foundation.

McNerney created the mural using house paints on aluminum siding panels. It took him 18 months to do the sketches for the project, and seven months to paint the panels in a studio on the ground floor of the Mitchell Block, the home of the Bohemian Foundation and Bohemian Companies.

McNerney, a former Marine, described the project as "art boot camp" because he was working with fast-drying house paint rather than traditional art media.

He worked closely throughout the project with Stryker, and finished over Easter weekend. He said Stryker set a clear vision from the beginning.

"The big picture was beautify Fort Collins, add something to this ugly alley, and it's going to be huge, but I want to get these musicians in, in particular," he said.

The Downtown Development Authority plans to work on other Old Town alley beautification projects to add allure to Fort Collins shopping, dining and entertainment hub.

Stryker said the mural idea started out as something for Bohemian employees to look at out their windows rather than a neighboring brick wall. She originally wanted to portray Fort Collins musicians she liked, and the artwork grew from there.

"If you were standing at the back of a nightclub and you were looking over a crowd of people, who would you see there?" Stryker said in an interview with the Coloradoan. "And I started thinking about all the musicians over my time here, who I remember and some of my favorites."

After realizing she had much more space to work with, Stryker drew inspiration from an iconic 1967 Beatles album cover.

"We still had so much more wall, and I started thinking about the Sgt. Pepper's album cover, and I thought maybe we could have all these icons, celebrities, musicians from the past, watching our guys," she said.

The Bohemian Foundation used the unveiling of Jazz Alley, which runs from Mountain Avenue to Walnut Street, to promote this year's Bohemian Nights at NewWestFest.

The event, which has drawn more than 70,000 people in recent years, will be Aug. 12-14 and will feature 80 Colorado bands and three national headliners.

The headline acts for Bohemian Nights at NewWestFest 2011 were formally announced Friday by the Bohemian Foundation. All events will be free and take place in Old Town Fort Collins.

>> Aug. 12 - G Love and Special Sauce

>> Aug. 13 - Tedeschi Trucks Band

>> Aug. 14 - Asleep at the Wheel.