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Sherman Rainbow Mural Highlights Nature

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If you haven't visited the village of Sherman in the past two weeks, upon arriving, you will be astounded (and maybe alarmed) to find yourself face-to-face with a giant bear ... and a heron, a bald eagle and a buck.

As part of Chautauqua County's first mural festival, Paint CHQ, Sherman was one of four communities that received murals, painted by regional and international artists. Sherman's mural, Over the Rainbow, which wraps around the west and south sides of The Cornerstone Restaurant, was officially dedicated with a ribbon-cutting on Sept. 13.

The wall art was painted by muralists Justin Suarez, aka Aerosol Kingdom, of Rochester and Emily Ding of Los Angeles. The west wall features a White-tailed deer, a female Bald Eagle and a Great Blue Heron, which, according to the Chautauqua County Partnership for Economic Growth, are "three of New York state's most iconic animals."

Along with the three large animals, there is a sunset, an arching rainbow, and native songbirds. The mural flows onto the south wall of The Cornerstone Restaurant and features a massive Black Bear, which is the first thing seen by visitors coming into Sherman on Route 76. To the right of the bear are a Northern Leopard Frog and an American Toad.

According to The Chautauqua County Partnership for Economic Growth "flowing from land into water, a variety of wildflowers give way to aquatic life, spotlighting species like the Blackchin Shiner and the Rainbow Darter, further emphasizing the interconnected beauty of this thriving habitat."



The PaintCHQ mural dedicated in Sherman focuses on nature in the area.

"This is the Southern Gateway to Sherman and it is a transformational project," said Village of Sherman Mayor Colleen Meeder. "I hope it speaks to residents and business owners, but also speaks to many others who pass through our village."

Meeder said that the idea for the mural was conceived through community input and a survey of Sherman area residents. "What we have created here, I think, is something extremely important to our community," she said. "It is a representation of the full Sherman community and the potential and value we have here."

Meeder said the results from the survey predominantly favored nature as the theme for the mural. She noted how all the animals portrayed are important to the life of the area. "The heron is now my favorite. It has really come alive and you can almost feel its softness when you look at it," she said.

Meeder also noted that the fish, frog and toad represent French Creek, which begins in the Sherman area. "The importance of French Creek is

often overlooked," she said.

The theme of the rainbow is one of promise, hope, unity and restoration, Meeder said. "Whether one is looking at the whole mural or a part, there is something about this painting that speaks to everyone," she said.

At the dedication on Sept. 13, the mural was introduced by Rebecca Wurster, Special Projects Coordinator with the Department of Planning and Development, and Planning Manager of the Chautauqua County Partnership for Economic Growth. "This has been a project in the works for almost three years," she said.

Wurster noted that the mural came to be through eight different funding sources, several individual contractors, county legislators, and many members of the Department of Planning and Development. "My staff worked really hard to pull this thing together," she said.

Wurster introduced Alex Hall, from A H Public Spaces Consulting, whom she described as "a guiding light through all of this." Hall expressed the desire that

the Paint CHQ Program would expand as a result of this mural.

"This has very much been a community forward process," Hall said. "I hope this is a catalyst for more and I hope you feel pride in this accomplishment."

Wurster also introduced Justin Suarez, noting that the other artist, Emily Ding had to return to California. Suarez extended his thanks to the entire community.

"I love to concentrate and focus on conservation," Suarez said. "This project was pretty much a green project for me in terms of the subject matter. I'm happy to leave it behind here for you and future generations to enjoy."

Also present for the dedication was Mark Geise, Deputy County Executive for Economic Development, Chautauqua County Legislator Marty Proctor, and Chautauqua County Executive PJ Wendel. Wurster sent out a special thank you to Roy and Becky Van Valkenburg who own the Cornerstone Restaurant.

"This has been a community-driven approach," Wurster said. "Today we dedicate Over the Rainbow to the people of Sherman."



Rebecca Wurster, Special Projects Coordinator with the Department of Planning and Development, speaks about the process that culminated in the mural.