

Trenton youth, artist create ‘Trenton Makes’ bridge mural at community center

By FOR THE TRENTONIAN

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TRENTON >> A collaboration between city youth, a renowned artist and staff at a local nonprofit helped beautify a community center.

All their hard work was capped off with a stunning mural portraying the iconic “Trenton Makes” bridge that was created by Leon Rainbow with the help of the Trenton kids at the Westward Community Center on Prospect Street.

Over the summer, students of the Isles Youth Institute Evening Program, an after-school program funded by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Outreach To At-Risk Youth (OTARY), helped spruce up the center. The mural was recently completed as part of the service learning project.

“The Isles Evening Program is designed to keep our youth off the streets during high risk hours and provide them with enhanced recreation, vocational, educational, outreach, and supportive services to the youth of Trenton and surrounding areas,” coordinator Stacy Heading said, noting the program works at improving connections with school/law enforcement and community based agencies. “Service learning is teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience. Our students learned the art of creating a mural through the teachings of Leon Rainbow.”

The youth who chipped in with the project felt proud of what they accomplished.

“It was amazing seeing a blank wall turn into a wonderful piece of art, and we did it,” Lashaye Fleming said.

“We came together as a group with Mr. Rainbow and completed this project,” Donte Davis said. “It felt good, doing something positive instead of being on the streets.”

Timothy Ingram not only helped design the mural, but he also played a key role in painting the Westward Center gym with Isles instructor Juan Ramirez.

“This mural project really inspired me to give back,” Ingram said. “I made a difference and this masterpiece will be on the wall for years to come.”

Moreover, Heading said the psychology of the project was to inspire the children who attend the center to “gravitate to the positive work their older peers are displaying.”

“The kids would stand around them every time they began working, and asked questions like, ‘What y’all doing today?’ or ‘How you do that?’,” the program director said. “We want to produce young leaders in our community, they are not just our future, they are our right now.”

Alexandria Duggins and George Williams were both inspired and amazed at how the young people would stand around them and watch them work on the mural.

“We felt like role models and stars,” they said.

Some felt it was a way of repayment to the center.

“It feels good giving back to a center that always opened the door for me,” Zae’Quan Cofield said.

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