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Mansfield unveils local artist's 340-foot town mural

- BY JUDEE COSENTINO FOR THE SUN CHRONICLE

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Artist Ian Gaudreau holds the "History Award" given to him by the town of Mansfield at his mural's unveiling Saturday. . Gaudreau is a graduate of Mansfield High School. **DETAIL:** The project artist Ian Gaudreau speaks to a fan of his work, while holding the 'History Award' given to him by the town of Mansfield. Gaudreau is a graduate of Mansfield High School.

MANSFIELD - True masterpieces take time, as has been the case with the mural on the Route 106 underpass.

Saturday afternoon marked the unofficial end to the work as dignitaries and "townies" alike joined together on the North Common to celebrate the achievement of artist Ian Gaudreau. The mural, approved at town meeting in 2012 to depict various aspects of the town's history, was scheduled to be finished in May 2014.

It took Gaudreau three years to paint the mural, which is 340 feet long and ranges from two to 13 feet high. Gaudreau is a 2004 graduate of the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and dedicated the mural to his high school art teacher, Lee Anne Wilhelmson, who first inspired him to become an artist.

Along the way, Gaudreau had to make some revisions to his work, but once he found the right formula, "There was no greater feeling than that," Gaudreau said.

"It was exhausting, and it was extremely fulfilling," Gaudreau also said.

Several people could be seen watching Gaudreau as he applied the finishing touches to his masterpiece, including Ellen Spilewski, whose mother, Rose Armfield Spilewski, is featured in the "Faces In the Crowd" portion of the mural due to her contributions to the mural's funding.

"I've seen it from the beginning," said Spilewski, who lives only blocks away from the underpass. "I've seen [Gaudreau and his volunteers] working mornings and nights, and I'm going to miss them.

"While at first glance, the mural appears to be one large painting, it is actually divided into 13 sections woven together which represent various aspects of the town. At the beginning, there is the Old Town Hall, which was built in 1883 but burned down in 1970, along with the Lovell Block Building, a parade of geese representing the Austin Goose Farm, and Lowney's Chocolate Factory.

From there, the "Faces In the Crowd" section features a group of people at the racetrack established by the Mansfield Trotting Association in 1869, and gives a panoramic view of the mills, train station, Fulton Pond, and finishes with "The Door Behind The Wall," a replication of the door into the Fischer Richardson House, which is the second-oldest house in the town.

Mansfield Mural Committee chairperson, Nancy Wall, was impressed by not only Gaudreau's work, but the support from the community to fund the project and appreciate the work of art as it gradually began taking on its final shape. "I think it's wonderful," Wall said. "(Gaudreau) has done such a great job."

Although there were complaints about how long the project was taking, Mansfield Town Manager Bill Ross noted that artwork on such a grand scale "takes more time than you think." "It also adds to the value and beauty of this piece," Ross said. "I'm very pleased with the work that (Gaudreau's) done." Spilewski supported Ross' view by noting, "The pope probably said, 'Why isn't it done yet?' to Michelangelo when he was painting the Sistine Chapel."

Funds for the mural, raised through private grants and contributions reached between \$65,000 and \$70,000.

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