

Muralist paints Eugene, has big sights for its future

By Jacqueline Woge
Emerald Reporter

Travelers passing 12th Avenue and High Street may have noticed a gray-toned mural coming to life on what used to be a plain 1970s building wall.

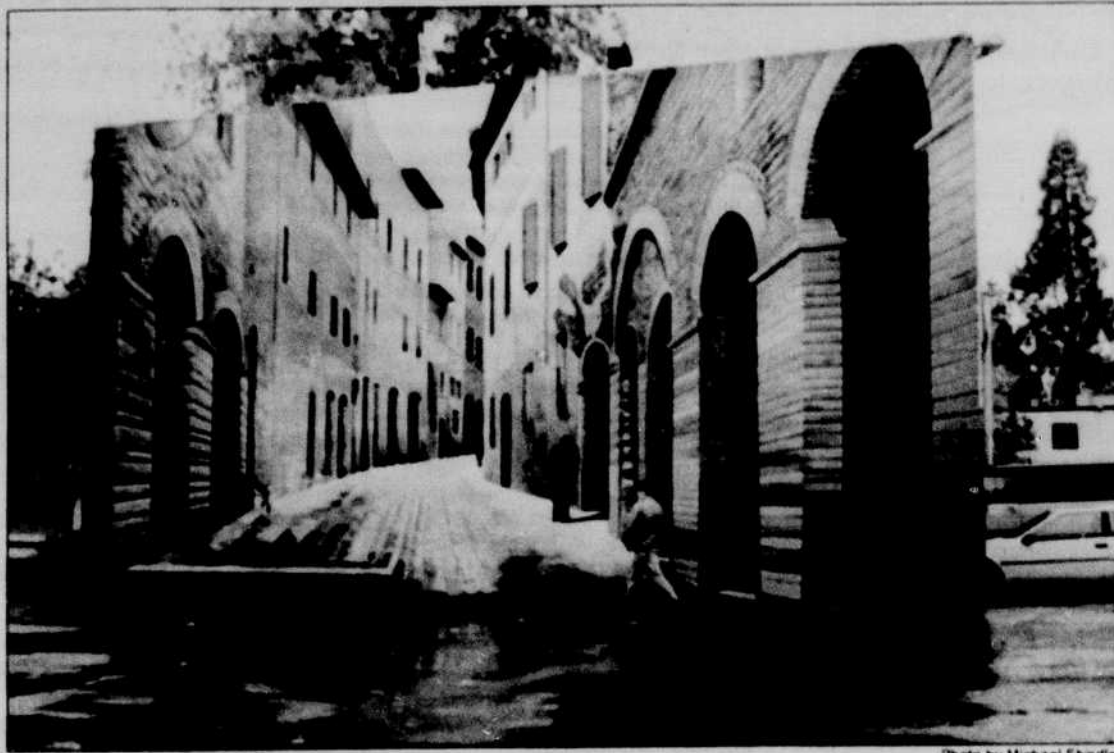
Painted with water-based, black and white house paint, the scene shows a Northern Italian town, similar to the one artist Jim Evangelist's grandparents came from.

"I can't tell you how many little kids I get coming up all excited about this kind of thing," he said. "One family was home-schooling their kids and brought the whole family out. I sat for a couple hours talking about murals and answering their questions. These kids walked away with their eyes like saucers."

Relocating from Florida this past summer in order to evade "crime and crack," Evangelist learned the building's owners, Kohnen Larson CPAs, considered hosting a project by another artist. But that project was never started.

Taking the initiative, Evangelist approached the company with several ideas. The firm chose its favorite design and supplied paint and materials. To help pay for his time, the company agreed that Evangelist could credit other businesses on the mural.

Although Evangelist has gained some financial support, he said other sponsors would be appreciated, especially to pay for a graffiti-proof, high-tech, guaranteed-for-50-years sealer coat.



People have come from cities throughout the Willamette Valley just to see Jim Evangelist's Italian scene mural on 12th Avenue and High Street.

The sealer coat would help the mural last longer, but because of the "rich, deteriorating and crumbly kind of scene," Evangelist said weathering will only enhance the image.

"As a last resort, I'll get a paint company from Portland to come in and seal the wall and do a demonstration of their product by trashing the painting," Evangelist said. "I always find a way to get things to work."

Although some artists prefer to distance themselves from the public and outside influences,

Evangelist, enjoys discussing his work and his philosophy about the role of public art.

"I think landlords, business owners and building owners should all consider using wall space for murals," he said.

From his three years of experience as a nightclub owner, Evangelist has found that people truly appreciate it when businesses take initiatives such as putting up a mural.

Evangelist said he believes that when a business puts \$2,500 into a mural project, it is supporting the artist, stimu-

lating the environment and workplace and creating change in a dynamic way.

Evangelist said that for about \$50,000 — one-tenth the cost it took to open Olive Street — Eugene could create an attraction that locals and visitors could appreciate.

People have come from cities all around the Willamette Valley to see his Italian scene. One lady from British Columbia planned her vacation around visiting Eugene to see the mural, he said.

With the fresh, outside per-

spective of a newcomer, Evangelist said he believes Eugene is ready for a cultural renaissance.

"The community is ready to support focused, cleared, professional and earnest efforts by creative and talented people in continuing to make this community even better than it is," he said.

Evangelist said he sees numerous opportunities in open buildings and open spaces around town. He has already outlined his next project, a Tibetan scene on the Bread Shop building, at Willamette Street and 15th Avenue.

Besides working on the Kohnen Larson and Bread Shop buildings, Evangelist is lobbying businesses about a downtown dream project — a mural on the large wall space in the parking lot across from Lane Community College's downtown annex.

Presenting himself professionally to business people is a skill Evangelist got from his work as a paralegal.

Finding work in law "for the birds," Evangelist was drawn to painting — sets, props and canvases — work he had done as a volunteer. Never formally trained, he learned to paint by just "shutting up and listening" to skilled people.

Evangelist then stumbled into doing murals and other public work "kind of to prove to my girlfriend at the time that I really wasn't going to get the job that she thought I should get, because I thought it was all political."

Since then, murals projects have "just kept happening."

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