

THE GREAT TABLECLOTH

A shrine opens at FOOD for Lane County's Dining Room downtown

Imagine this: A loved one passes but there's no funeral where you can honor her memory, no loving obituary to read in the paper, no gravestone to lay flowers upon. In some cases, any traces that she existed at all have been wiped clean.

"A lot of homeless people lose their identity and then they pass away," says Josie McCarthy, the manager for FOOD for Lane County's Family Dinner Program at the Dining Room on 8th. "There's not a big celebration of them, of their life."

This is a problem McCarthy faces frequently at the Dining Room, where volunteers serve 300 meals every day to Eugene's homeless and transient population in a restaurant-style setting.

McCarthy and local artist Alison McNair have had enough. Troubled by this lack of memorial, the duo teamed up to create a shrine in the entrance of the Dining Room, a shrine that will have its grand reveal during First Friday ArtWalk. The mixed-media monument — a sparkling bricolage of tiles, paintings, table legs, dishes and little sculptures reminiscent of a Día de Muertos altar — is not

just a memorial to diners, but to the Dining Room community and the mural they created a decade ago that used to wrap around the building like a checkered tablecloth. All traces of that mural were wiped clean in 2012 when the building underwent renovation and the images diners painted after eating a warm supper — sunflowers, their handprints and names, rolling hills — were powerblasted and then painted over. The process to recapture that great tablecloth, a project made possible by a \$1,400 community arts grant that McNair secured through the Lane Arts Council, has taken McNair and volunteers over a year.

At an open house for Eugene's homeless population hosted at WOW Hall last year, McNair and her partner Jamie King went around collecting the names and stories of people who had died on the city's streets. They gathered first names, like Monica, or nicknames like Sweet Pea (aka Michael David Rister), and sometimes all they could find was just one part of who they were, like "dad" or "son." They took those names and hosted their own open house at the Dining Room this spring, where diners helped create memorial plaques for the shrine.



"Each one of these people were being honored in a really fabulous way," McNair says as she slides her hand across the mosaic of plaques. She points to a plaque shaped like a rainbow with a name etched in it. "Andrew Joseph is a little boy," she says. Then she touches a tile with paintbrushes carved into the surface. "This is Sweet Pea, who was murdered on the streets of Eugene last year," she says. "He was an artist." McNair notes that there are blank tiles and spaces for more names to be added in the future.

"My hope for the diners is that they see themselves in the mural," she says. "They use it as a living memorial — bring flowers, see the names of people they love. They can celebrate birthdays of people they love who are gone."

And for first-time visitors to the Dining Room who stop by during First Friday ArtWalk? McNair hopes to expand people's understanding of homelessness. "That person wasn't just a homeless person. That was an individual with a life and a family and people that love them and talents and all of those things," she says, adding, "We're all at the table together." ■

The Dining Room will be open at 7 pm Friday, Aug. 2, for First Friday ArtWalk, 270 W. 8th Ave.

ARTSHOUND

They're ready for their close-up: Wife-and-husband team **Tracy and Rob Sydor** have long been snapping stunning photos of live shows like Primus and Beats Antique, *EW* covers and high fashion images around Eugene. Now they have opened a studio for their companies **Digital Latte Photography** and **Eugene Commercial Photography**. Nosh on Sammitch or sip a Ninkasi brew while bouncing to the beats of DJ Mr. Rose at the studio grand opening 7 pm Friday, Aug. 9 (1000 S. Bertelsen, Unit 2, Eugene).

Sniffing out what you shouldn't miss in the arts this week

PHOTO BY TRACY SYDOR | DIGITALLATTE.COM

Create! Eugene — the inaugural month-long arts blitz put on by the Arts & Business Alliance of Eugene — is officially in full swing. During the month of August there will be a smorgasbord of arts and culture workshops and events, from the **Eugene Textile Center's Spinning Mohair** course [8/2] course to beginner classes at **Ballet Fantastique** [8/5] to the **Plein Air Paint Out Competition** [8/21]. Visit createeugene.com to browse all 195 workshops.

First Friday ArtWalk downtown has a special guided excursion this month: the **Art the Box** tour — part of a public art competition of whimsically painted traffic control boxes — hosted by Eugene's **Public Art Manager Isaac Marquez** and competing artists Wendy Huhn, Alexander Southworth, Bryan Putnam and Bayne Gardner, starting at 6 pm at 13th and Willamette (in front of fire station). Hop off the beaten track with a stop at **The Gallery at the Watershed's Huge Beauty: The Work of Kirk Lybecker** — a work that includes Lybecker's glowing, hyperrealist large format watercolors of everything from irises to a beat-up Volkswagen Beetle.

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