

Mural instills family pride

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

The Farmworker Housing Development Corp. in Woodburn has long been a favorite of Spirit Mountain Community Fund.

In 2000, the Tribe's philanthropic arm gave the group \$100,000 to build an education center in Woodburn.

In 2003, Spirit Mountain gave \$58,000 for educational programs to be held in the Woodburn education center.

In 2005, Spirit Mountain gave \$20,000 to expand educational programs at the Colonia Libertad farmworker housing development in Salem.

And in 2007, it was awarded \$41,101 for a mural project and expansion of the educational program at the Colonia Amistad farmworker housing development.

Over the years, five other murals have appeared at various Farmworker Housing developments, each depicting farmworker histories and eliciting community pride. Each mural has been at the direction of the great Mexican muralist Hector Hernandez (www.hectorhh.com), who lives in Portland, and with the hands of 10 local middle school and high school students who volunteer for the job.

More comes than just the chance to slap paint on a big wall (or canvas).

Hernandez provides students a look into the rich history of murals, and how they have been utilized as an instrument of social change. He also teaches them the nuts and bolts of mural making: the design and painting processes.

"The talent of the kids is there," Hernandez said. "I work with very intelligent kids. I learn a lot from them as well. We have a brainstorm session and they start providing ideas for themes and images. That's what makes it very exciting for me, their fresh ideas. They bring ideas that I didn't expect at the moment. We develop this dialogue."

"It was very interesting to learn more about some of the early history of my community, and the history of the Grand Ronde Tribe, and how they share many similarities with my Aztec heritage from Mexico," said Margaria Carrillo, a student participant from Central High School in Independence. "This subject is not really something you can commonly learn at school."

Initially, the idea driving the mural at Colonia Amistad was that it be reflective of the community, said Jaime Arredondo, communications coordinator for Farmworker Housing.

To that end, Hernandez began with workshops to teach students

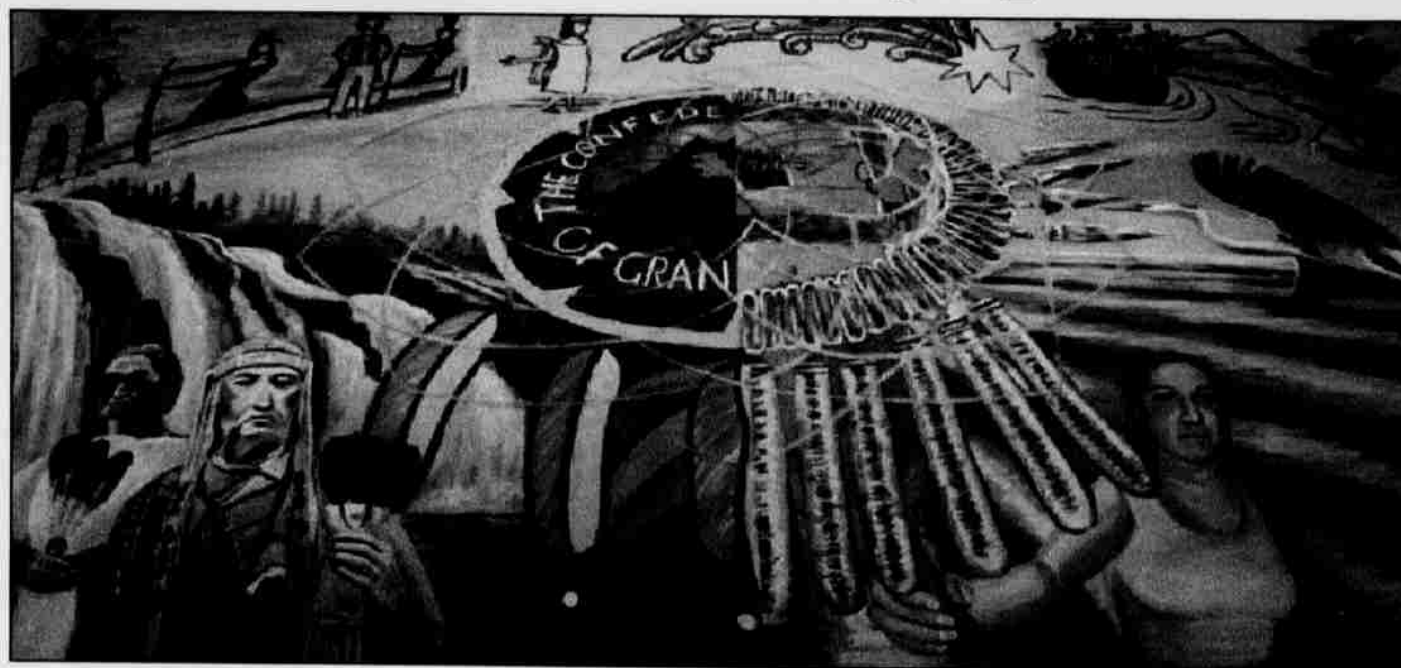


Photo courtesy of Jaime Arredondo

A mural funded by Spirit Mountain Community Fund decorates the Colonia Amistad farmworker housing development in Independence. The mural melds Grand Ronde Tribal history with Aztec heritage from Mexico.

Editor's note: This is the 11th in a monthly series of stories in 2008 by *Smoke Signals* that showcase the real-life effects of Spirit Mountain Community Fund donations. Since its inception in 1997, the Community Fund, the philanthropic arm of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, has donated more than \$40 million to groups in 11 western Oregon counties. These stories focus on the good work those generous Tribal dollars do within nearby communities and the effect they have on people and programs.

the rich history of the Mexican people, and how to utilize that history as an instrument of social change.

In late June, the painting began, Arredondo said.

The goal morphed into a mural that bridges Native American culture of the Grand Ronde Tribe and the indigenous culture of Mexico. It took July and August to paint the mural.

"One of the young ladies that participated," Arredondo said. "She's from Central High School, Angeles Soto. She brings her friends from high school and family to check out the mural every week."

Among the things Soto reported learning from the project was this: "Nobody is perfect, but we should try our best, and if things don't come out right, you just have to keep on trying. The important thing is not to give up and don't let negative

Narrative of the Mural

The mural is approximately 8-by-20 feet. At the upper central part of the mural the image of Moctezuma watching a comet as an omen of the coming of Europeans opens the narrative.

Both cultures (the Native American at the Willamette Valley region and the Meso-American cultures) first encounter the European colonizers, which is depicted by using the very same records and images as the native cultures in the Willamette Valley and also in Veracruz, Mexico.

At the center of the mural an Aztec shield and the Grand Ronde shield form one sunflower that blooms as a result of resiliency and endurance held by a young mestiza woman (Angeles Soto). The other half of the mural depicts a wise woman holding a feather fan that becomes one with the shield as a sign of wisdom to survive and resist. A modern Native

woman achieving a professional life is the result of following that path of wisdom.

In both extremes of the mural, an Aztec dancer and a Grande Ronde Native American dancer are depicted as guardians of both cultural traditions. Willamette Falls and the fields in the background are the natural Northwest scenario where both traditions converge. A flying crane at the right of the mural represents a migratory bird recalling the legend of the origins of Aztlan and at the same time remind us of the migratory movements between North America and Meso-America by humans and fauna.

The message is the common background of both cultural traditions and the friendship (Amistad) that both groups bring up as a common historical experience. ■

comments, jokes or lectures put you down."

The skills taught during the making of a mural include basic concepts and procedures in painting, design with graphic arts software, integrating mural work into its architectural surroundings, preventing damage with preservation techniques, and transferring scale model designs to the mural surface.

Families can reflect on the ideas behind the murals, Arredondo said. "It documents our history. It's out there. It creates a positive impact that we have a history and this is it. There's a lot of pride and ownership in that. Unconsciously, it builds

pride in the family."

Work on the entrance sign at Colonia Amistad was not initially welcomed by the community, Hernandez said.

"But when they saw this work done with mosaics, they perceived that even these low-income units would have something attractive to share. I hear a couple times negative comments when we started," said Hernandez, but when it was finished, people were stopping by asking about traditions in Mexico. That's the way that public art translates."

"Plans are ready," Arredondo said, "for a few more murals." ■

Support group forming

A support group for parents and caregivers of Grand Ronde children with special needs is forming.

If your child, grandchild, foster child, etc., has extra challenges — medically, emotionally or developmentally — and you would like to collaborate and share resources with other parents, send your contact information in an e-mail to lewis.dm@comcast.net or call David and Donna Lewis at 503-566-3093.

Lewis said the support group is compiling an e-mail and telephone contact list and will later coordinate meetings with group members. ■

CULTURAL GATHERINGS

■ NOV. 15: **TIIN-MA GATHERING.** Winter lodge at Yakama Nation Cultural Heritage Center, 580 Buster Road. **TOPPENISH, WA.** 509-865-2800.

■ NOV. 29: **5TH ANNUAL KANAWAKSOOMA CELEBRATION POWWOW.** Mount Hood Community College, 26000 S.E. Stark. **GRESHAM, OR.** 503-491-7277.

If you or anyone you know has information on cultural events happening, *Smoke Signals* would be glad to list it in our Cultural Gatherings. Please e-mail news@grandronde.org or write to *Smoke Signals*, 9615 Grand Ronde Road, Grand Ronde, Oregon 97347.