

Muralists take over middle school gym

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

For three Grand Ronde youth, the Tribe's first mural project is a chance to work with professional artists and contribute to the Tribal community.

The finished mural will sit above the maintenance shed behind the Grand Ronde Tribal Housing Authority building, at the entrance to the Tribe's housing development.

It has been two years in the planning, but now the work is under way and the mural crew expects it to be finished before the month is out.

"It took quite awhile like anything does, but we had good people to see it through," said Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr., who was at the former middle school gym on Saturday, Jan. 7, as the paint started to go up on the 64-by-12-foot (at its highest) mural.

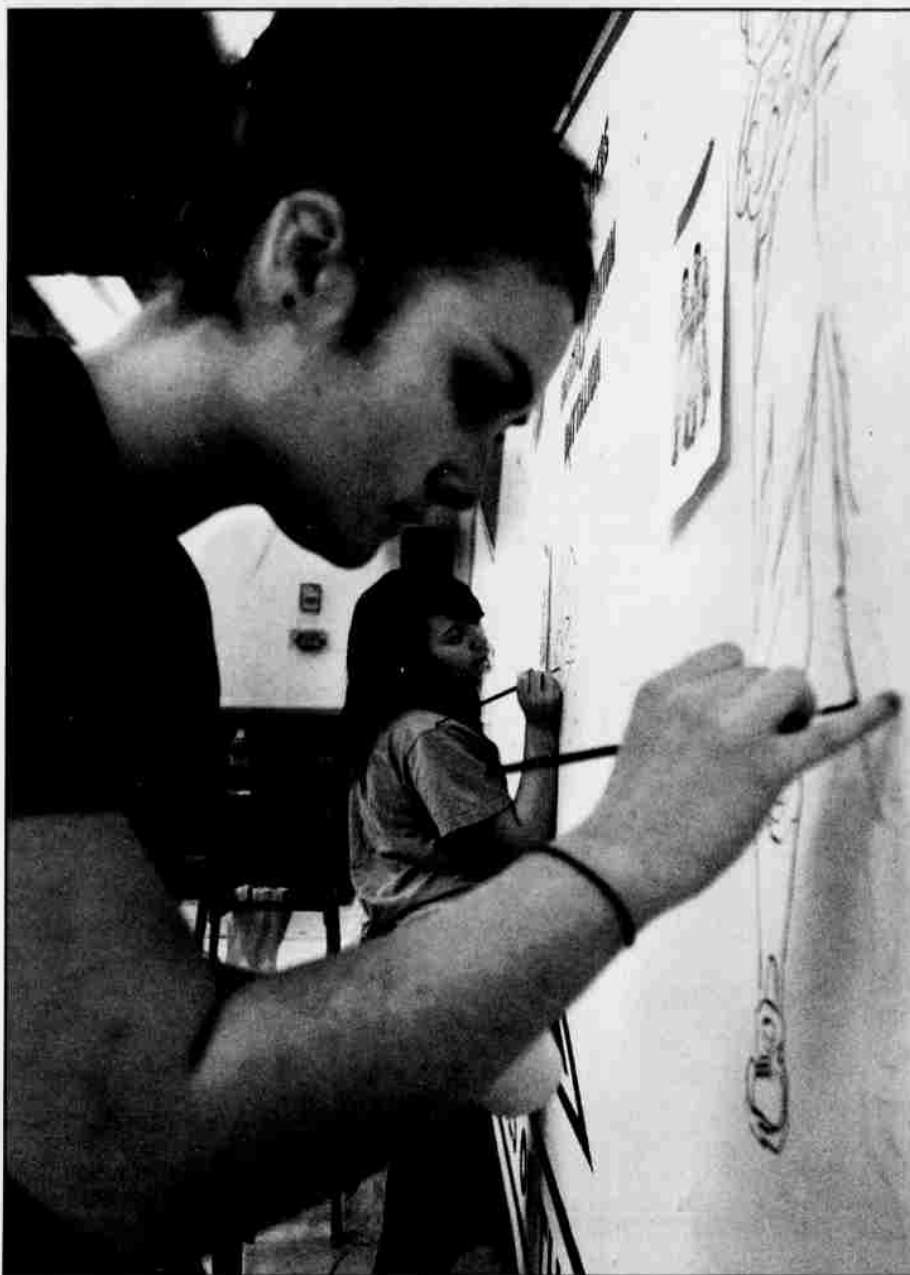
"The project was designed to enable youth to express their artistic abilities in a positive and meaningful way in response to gang graffiti," said Tribal member Lisa Leno, manager of the Youth Prevention arm of Social Services.

The graffiti problem vanished soon after the Community Awareness Team started its work, but the mural project kept moving forward.

Enter muralist Karl Abramovic (www.americansurreal.com), an Oregon native who is most recently a McMinnville import from Los Angeles, where he painted television and commercial sets as well as public works mural projects.

"Murals are a good way of bringing community members together," said Abramovic. "In Los Angeles, taggers would prowl around behind me, watching what I did."

When he brought a mural proposal to the Tribe, the timing was right and Youth Prevention set



Tribal members Anna Jeffers, front, and Alexandria Thorsgard paint over lines that were traced on the mural as they work on the Grand Ronde Mural Project at the former Middle School gym on Wednesday, Jan. 11.

about finding funding. Ultimately, Youth Prevention and the Tribal Housing Authority

each committed \$10,000 to the project and Tribal Council added \$5,000.



When completed, a mural with this design will hang above the maintenance shed behind the Grand Ronde Tribal Housing Authority building.

Abramovic brought on three other artists — all with experience with youth or murals, he said. They included Spider Moccasin, also known as Mr. M, and sometimes as Marcus Moseley (Wasco-Warm Springs); Toma Villa (Yakama), who is known for painting the mural on Macy's Grocery store in Warm Springs; and Leo Wayman, an artist who has worked with Abramovic before.

Grand Ronde Tribal members Anna Jeffers, Heyaza Brien and Alexandria Thorsgard were selected as interns for the project, and before it is done they will have rolled paint over the solid sections, painted in details from an Abramovic design and learned about murals from those who do them best.

"The young people can stand back and say, 'We had a part in that,'" said Bobb, who designed the West Valley Veterans Memorial on the Tribal campus. "The different images should be pretty inspirational."

"I've always loved drawing and wanted to learn a little more from professionals," said Thorsgard, 12. "When I first started, I had no idea. They're really good teachers. They're showing us techniques."

Jeffers, 17, described the experience as, "Really positive. They tell you about how the paint dries, how to mix it."

"I liked how they enlarged it with the projector," said Brien, 14. "They teach you how to get the paint on smooth. There's lots of math with paint mixing," he observed. He names art, carving, painting and cartooning among his skills.

"The plan is," said Tribal member Cristina Lara, who is a Youth Prevention Intern also working on the project, "that this is a different style of art we wanted to do in the community. Maybe more for Tribal housing. This is the beginning of having this kind of art in our community. I'm glad it's here. I'm so proud this is here. This is going to be a great thing for our community." ■



Tribal members clockwise from left, Heyaza Brien, Anna Jeffers and Alexandria Thorsgard practice outlining before they actually begin work on the mural.