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Mural plays out Powerhouse history

LISA VANDERVELDE
Morning Star Staff

Powerhouse Theatre's journey from past to present is being told by transforming a bare, grungy wall into an historic mural.

After tossing around the idea for a couple of years the board of the Powerhouse Theatrical Society decided to tackle the project and bring a little beauty to the east side of their building.

"We want the mural to represent the theatre's history and the history of the building as well," said Barbara Keith, Powerhouse Theatre communications and business manager.

"Originally it was the powerhouse, it generated all the electricity for Vernon, until one day the generator went through the wall and they decided to move it," she said.

After sitting empty for a number of years, local architects Doug Huggins and Drew Allen purchased the building from the city and turned it into a community theatre. The first play, *Madwomen of Chailot*, opened in 1963, on the same day John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

"They wondered if people would turn up, but people came all dolled up in furs and tuxedos and it was a big night," said Keith.

The board was looking for the right artist to capture the rich history of Powerhouse and after looking through the theatre's 50th anniversary book and learning the background story, local artist James Postill brought them a rendering and was quickly hired for the project.

Postill isn't new to the mural scene.

"There have been people honking their horns, giving us thumbs-up, yelling out their windows saying, 'way to go, good job.'"

— Postill



LISA VANDERVELDE/MORNING STAR

James Postill and Alexa Harwood-Jones work on the mural on the east side of the Powerhouse Theatre Wednesday.

He has painted murals in Lumby and a fresco mural at the Vernon Community Arts Centre but this is his first large-scale

mural in Vernon.

With the help of his assistant Alexa Harwood-Jones, a fine arts student at

the University of British Columbia Okanagan, they hope to complete the mural by the end of June with the unveiling to be held July 1.

"It was a horrible looking wall with all the trains going by and cars parking over the years," said Keith, who is excited by the transformation.

What captured Postill's attention and passion for this project was the story behind Powerhouse Theatre.

"It was a unique challenge to take all the raw information and try and translate it into a visually interesting story that people would be compelled to not only look at but experience," said Postill.

He spent hundreds of hours researching, sketching and studying different poses made by people in old photographs, to get the feel of the mural just right.

"As I draw their features and study them it almost feels like I'm getting to know them as people," said Postill, about drawing architects Huggins and Allen.

For Harwood-Jones, the project has been a valuable learning experience.

"I've been learning about the amount of preparation that goes into something of this scale and the amount of work by so many people in the community as well as doing art professionally and for the community," said Harwood-Jones.

She is grateful to the Powerhouse Theatre for including a student assistant for the project.

"I think it's really cool that they are helping artists and young emerging artists as well," she said. "It has been a hugely amazing experience and it will look good on my resume and I'm learning so many skills and practical skills because it is so hands-on, it is stuff I wouldn't even learn in school."

As far as work environments go, Postill and Harwood-Jones have enjoyed their time on this project and the positive community feedback.

"People have been great," said Postill. "There have been people honking their horns, giving us thumbs-up, yelling out their windows saying 'way to go, good job.'"

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