

Public art project benefits Wollaston Heritage Centre



On July 10, Coe Hill artists Lee Maidlow and Sheila Leuschner consult the plan for a large historical mural being painted, to be donated and installed on the front of Wollaston Heritage Centre. Two dozen people came during the day to paint and enjoy music and food.

By Jim Eadie

Two Coe Hill artists have undertaken the painting of a large historical mural which once completed will be affixed to the front wall of the Wollaston Heritage Centre building in Coe Hill. Sheila Leuschner and Lee Maidlow are both mixed media artists who are donating their time, but encouraging other community members and artists to participate in the painting, making it truly a community gift to their local heritage centre.

Edith McCaw, a Wollaston Heritage founder and member, noted they had been approached by Leuschner who wished to prepare and donate a painting after receiving some of the wood left from clearing the old iron mine site located next to the heritage centre. "We discussed it with her, and we thought it would be really beautiful to have an outdoor mural," said McCaw. Realizing the project was too big for her alone, she spoke to fellow artist Maidlow, and the two hatched a plan to involve as many local artistic, and not so artistic community members as possible.

Working from 100-year-old photographs provided by McCaw, the artists prepared a sketch of a proposed mural which includes images of the old iron mine head frame, the Central Ontario Railroad station in Coe Hill, logging with horses, and the moon rising over Wollaston Lake. The proposal was approved by Wollaston Heritage, and work began on the 15-foot by six-foot mural.

An invitation was put out to the community, and on July 10 Maidlow hosted a daylong event at her studio near Coe Hill where nearly two dozen people dropped in at some point during the day to enjoy food, live music, and most importantly to paint. The work is expected to continue on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday for the next two weeks, and community members can come by her studio to see the progress being made, and to help out with the painting if they wish.

"This is public art," said Maidlow. "I also hired Brenda Storm, a young Coe Hill musician Brenda play today she sings like a storm. We need to find a way to support local artists and musicians." Maidlow herself is also a musician.

"I knew this mural was a really neat idea," said Leuschner, "but I also knew I didn't have the hours and hours needed, so I was glad to make it a shared project. Lee has the perfect spot here, and we are involving the whole community."

Maidlow is passionate about small community building incentives, and the benefits to everyone in the community. "I call this project: creative inclusion," she said, referring to the concept of community direct involvement and support for the arts, gathering with food and music, learning about local cultures and history, meeting new people and hearing different ideas, and preparing a

beautiful piece of public art for the local heritage centre.

The new Wollaston Heritage Centre is open every Friday, Saturday and Sunday from noon until 4 p.m. The group is currently working on rebuilding the old headframe at the mine site, and in the future has plans to develop a park like setting which will include historic pieces of mining equipment; logging, farming and railroad equipment, a reconstructed 1880 era barn, and other indoor and outdoor exhibits. Details about this project can be found at www.wollastonheritage.com/heritage-centre.htm

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