

Velvet Lounge



Nicole Mitchell performing with her group "Black Earth Ensemble" at the Velvet Lounge, 67 E. Cermak Rd., on Sat Feb. 9.

Rogan Birnie

Murals coming to Cottage Grove

by Kate Hawley

Troy Patterson eyed the giant slab of press-board propped up against the studio wall, its surface criss-crossed with pencil lines, its edges carved to outline human faces. "Nice," said the 15-year-old, under his breath. "Real nice."

Patterson is among a handful of students working on murals at Little Black Pearl Art Center, 1060 E. 47th St., under the direction of artist Jharet Brantley.

A total of five murals will hang in front of a smattering of vacant lots in the 4300 to 4700 blocks of Cottage Grove Avenue, an effort to boost the attractiveness of the strip during a long-term project to revitalize it.

The first mural — the one Patterson admired — will be up by the end of the month, weather permitting, according to Bernita Johnson-Gabriel of Quad Communities Development Corp. (QCDC) the non-profit behind the Cottage Grove plans.

Johnson envisions Cottage Grove's well-worn buildings transformed into a retail corridor that mirrors Andersonville on the North Side — a dense, bustling row of high-end boutiques and eateries.

Little Black Pearl, just around the corner from the proposed mural sites, has been integral to QCDC's mission, designing the banners and providing design consultation for businesses interested in setting up shop on Cottage Grove. The murals are its latest effort.

Artist Carla Carr laid the groundwork for the murals' design, Brantley said, but now he's adding his own spin with a swirl of neon hues and squiggly white lines.

"I'm a contemporary kid," he said. "I love color. I love movement. I didn't want to take too much away from the original design, just make it a little hipper."

Other murals will explore Cottage Grove's past and future, a topic Brantley said he's in the middle of researching.

He's getting technical help from Dante DiBartolo, who has created murals and other public art installations in Joliet, among other places.

The students are playing a key role as well, drawing, priming and painting Brantley's design — of which Patterson is an enthusiastic fan. "I really admire his work," Patterson said. "Basically, anything this guy does is cool."

Patterson was driving with his father on the Dan Ryan Expressway this summer when he saw medallions painted by Little Black Pearl students. "I asked my dad who did those," he said. "I wanted to come down here so I could get some of my work in public."

Since he showed up at Little Black Pearl in September, it's been hard to keep him out of the studio. "He attacks a project," Brantley said.

"I like to do a lot of art," said Patterson. "That's basically my life."

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HARBOR

continued from page 1

Rather, the city would issue a revenue bond, which they said fees earned from boaters would repay. "We certainly believe that this will work," Weykamp said. "This is entirely funded by the boaters — no taxpayer dollars."

The Park District reports that the city's harbors are a profitable undertaking, raking in more than \$12 million in income every year. And the demand for boat slips is high, Weykamp contended. Currently the city has 5,000 slips, with a waiting list of 600.

The Park District is currently planning two new harbors, one at 31st Street and another at Navy Pier. The 31st Street harbor is slated to open in May 2010.

Weykamp argued that the new harbor and its environs would benefit the community as well as the boaters. He noted the results of a study by the Marine Research Center at Michigan State University that found the harbor would create 224 jobs, \$6 million in labor income and \$9.6 million in net value added to the area's economy.

Community perks would include youth fishing and sailing programs, a new community space with lake and skyline views, a place to store canoes and kayaks, and an improved parking setup.

But some who attended Monday's meeting were skeptical about the merits of EDAW's parking proposal. The new green-roofed garage would have half of its 300 spaces set aside for people renting boat slips.

The remainder would be available to the public on a first-come, first-served basis. These 150 paid garage spaces would replace 162 free surface parking spaces currently on

the site, which several people argued would prove inconvenient for local families.

The proposal calls for an additional 500 surface parking spaces just west of Lake Shore Drive, possibly with a shuttle that will transport people to the waterfront. Several other parking sites are under consideration, including about 50 spaces just along the east side of Fort Dearborn and 100 or more spaces at the south end of the McCormick place lot.

Given the number of people in the broader region who already use the park, Leonard McGee, president of The Gap Community Organization, said he wasn't convinced that the new parking spaces would be sufficient.

He also pointed out that the private parking and boat slips could appear restrictive to residents who already use and enjoy the park. "Wherever you stop me from walking or going, I've lost an asset," he said. The crowd burst into applause.

Others said they feared congestion and traffic would become unmanageable if the 31st Street lakefront were to become a major destination for boaters.

Preckwinkle said that given the vacant lots and disinvestment the neighborhood faced just a decade ago, congestion is a good problem — a sign that a neighborhood is thriving. "You do not have the God-given right to live in the middle of a cornfield," she said.

Gladys McKinney agreed. A resident of Lake Parc Place, in the 3900 block of South Lake Park Avenue, she was one of several people at Monday's meeting who described the harbor design as "beautiful."

"I love it. I love it," she said. "My community is vibrant. It's coming alive."

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AACA launching membership drive through Mar. 5

The African American Contractors Association is launching a membership drive that will culminate in an event from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. on March 19 at the Harold

Washington Cultural Center, 4701 S. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. Awardees will be announced the March 19 gala event.

For more information, call 312-915-5960.

BURNS

continued from page 1

best, it gives you a good feeling."

Jefferies expressed confidence that high voter turnout, a full docket of challengers and a strong record in the state legislature would buoy her to victory.

Jefferies refused an interview after poll results indicated she had come in fourth in the polls. Through a spokesman she said she is a public servant and will continue to serve the public until her term is up a year from now.

At The Gage, Burns' supporters praised his grasp of policy and leadership savvy. Alan Thomas, of Hyde Park, said he'd become a Burns supporter just three days before, when

he heard Burns speak. "What I saw was an honesty," he said. "He's the first candidate in a long while who has a vision beyond the usual political speak."

Elizabeth Evans campaigned for Burns with her children, Benjamin and Natalie Glick, 9 and 7. "We wanted to go campaigning, so we did!" said Elizabeth Glick.

"What were our important issues?" her mother prompted.

"No handguns and no smoking inside," she answered. "Making sure everyone goes to school in a safe school."

Burns faces Republican Sylvester "Junebug" Hendricks in the general election.

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