



Fifth-grader Sadie Ratcliffe paints part of the mural on Feb. 10.

School mural embeds diversity message

By Rita Walton

HASTINGS — Farragut Middle School students put the final brushstrokes on a hallway mural celebrating diversity on the afternoon of Feb. 10.

The mural features a quote from author Leo Tolstoy — “Just as one candle lights another and can light thousands of other hearts, so one heart illuminates another heart and can illuminate thousands of other hearts.”

The students voted for the quote, which was one of five proposed by the FMS Affinity Group. Started in January 2021, the Affinity Group is for Black, Indigenous and People of Color [BIPOC] students “to feel seen, heard... and discuss what their identity is,” explained Jasmín Davis, an English as a New Language (ENL) teacher at the school and co-adviser of the organization.

Ezra Elliot and Sarah Federici-Diaz of the school’s art department helped students create images for the mural, tying in visual themes to the quote.

“They’re the teachers that inspired and collected and helped with the 75 submissions — some really clever drawings,” FMS Principal Jennifer Spirelli said.

With the quote and the artwork prepared, the project was then handed off to Joe Pimentel, a freelance artist, teacher, and the muralist who collaborated on a similar mural at Hastings High School last June.

The high school mural incorporates a quote from poet Maya Angelou — “We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal no matter their color.”

For the 35-foot middle school mural, Pimentel created digital versions of 15 student drawings, projected them onto the beige wall, and outlined the final design for students to paint. He equated the process to “a big puzzle.”

Students and staff signed up to help paint the mural at designated times.

“Between voting on the quote and [doing] the painting itself, most of the kids

Students who worked on the mural received instruction and encouragement from Pimentel.

“Be level with the wall and try not to leave your hand on the wall,” he coached. “Now for the hearts, I recommend outlining and shaping. I’d keep your cup next to your hand and use the side edge of the brush for the lines.”

Though Pimentel touched up and varnished the mural, he wanted the students to do most of the painting. “Give them ownership and — with the potential kids have — they see if you work on your craft and creativity, you see where it leads,” Pimentel said.

The result of this hard work is a

in school were involved in this project. Even some [school] board members came to paint,” Spirelli said.

Elizabeth Lugomer-Pomper, a fifth-grader who painted a section of the mural, said, “I feel happy, it feels good that other generations are going to see this. I feel like this is going to be a great mural for the school and I feel this is going to make the halls better. And if I get a locker here next year, then I can maybe see my artwork.”

mural on a light-blue background, with purple hands forming a heart shape in the middle. The Tolstoy quote is along the top of the wall with bright yellow, red, and orange candles and figures interspersed below.

Pimentel also made a time-lapse video of the project’s progress.

Enthusiasm for creating the mural came from all levels of the school community, according to Jada Dickens, a math specialist and co-adviser of the FMS Affinity Group.

“The Hastings Education Foundation helped to fund this and were very supportive. They really encourage DIY projects,” Dickens said.

The school district’s ENL coordinator, and diversity and inclusion coordinator, Jenice Mateo-Toledo, contributed her experience as co-adviser to the high school Affinity Group. Mateo-Toledo noted that the mural is one of several projects about diversity that the district has sponsored.

“The racial equity days have been very important,” she said, referring to events held Feb. 1-3 that aimed to teach all district students about racial equity. “Our Race Matters Committee has been active. We’ll continue to work with the community to discuss issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.”