



KATHY DALEY | DEMOCRAT

Members of the Jeffersonville Chamber of Commerce and the beautification group JEMS gather at the new mural last Saturday holding signs that stress "Jeffersonville matters."

Firehouse mural seeks to inspire community

BY KATHY DALEY

JEFFERSONVILLE — As though on cue, the Jeffersonville fire siren blared an emergency just as a new mural on the side of the firehouse's garage was unveiled last Saturday with the message emblazoned upon it urging: "Cultivate Your Community."

Later, First Assistant Chief Scott McGowan said someone in a nearby building had inadvertently pulled a fire alarm. But he added that the fire department was delighted with the new 24-by-eight-foot mural.

"Anything for the community," Chief McGowan said. "They asked us and we didn't think twice. It's second nature for us to help."

Artist Trey Speegle, who did the mural gratis for the beautification group JEMS, said that's just the point.

"The best art is art that reaches the people," said Speegle, who divides his time between homes in Manhattan and Youngsville. "Thousands of people will see this again and again, and the message will sink in — that people are fixing up the community and that it's important to get involved."

Speegle's piece is a five-

paneled work that takes the viewer through nature's changes, from snow to autumn leaves to spring flowers and so on. But the uniqueness of the mural is that it is done in paint-by-number style, which is Speegle's signature format.

"Paint-by-numbers are a kind of super-Americana that represent a certain time period — one that began in the early 1950s," said Speegle. "For many people, doing paint-by-number represents their introduction to art. It's an aspect of American life that is gone."

Paint-by-numbers are not only his inspiration and jumping off place for his own artwork, but also Speegle's obsession: he owns 3,000 vintage paint-by-number paintings.

His obsession has paid off. A few years ago, he was tapped to create a mural for fashion designer Stella McCartney's Paris runway show. Recently, he's worked with the retailer Anthropologie to apply his work to rugs, wallpaper, plates, pillows and bedding. He currently has paintings on exhibition in Toronto and Houston.

Speegle got involved in designing the mural through



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Artist Trey Speegle, of Youngsville and New York City, is known for his "paint-by-number" artworks, which celebrate the popular art form of the 1950s. The mural in Jeffersonville is of that genre.

projects with Jeffersonville's Echo Press, owned by Robert Fisher, and Global Home, owned by Vivian Hung and her husband Joe Giamarese. Fisher printed a series of works by Speegle. Global Home exhibited Speegle's art.

Fisher, who is the vice president of JEMS, said the group's goal in considering a mural with a message was to beautify the parking lot "and hopefully inspire people who walk past to plant a flower, pick up a cigarette butt or join

JEMS."

Postcards and prints of the mural will be sold to support JEMS activities, organizers said.

Recently, JEMS planted ornamental pear trees along Main Street and a new ornamental grass garden at the Jeff Bank.

Saturday's crowd included current JEMS volunteers and those who hope to sign on soon. County Legislator David Sager says he's glad to see the infusion of new energy and volunteers and plans to get involved in hands-on community work when he steps down from the Legislature.

Helen Hughson, who helps out with JEMS flower planting along with her twin sister Hazel Hull, said putting the mural on the firehouse garage was a smart move.

"It's right by the (Peck's) grocery store so it's not like it's hidden where people can't see it," said Hughson, age 92. She noted she has a soft spot in her heart for art, which was one of her best subjects in school.

"I hope they take good care of the mural," Hughson said. "It's like flowers. You plant them, but then you have to take care of them."