



Tar Heel/Sarah Cagle

Michael Brown's mural has found its way into the eyes of travelers in downtown Chapel Hill

Mural gives new perspective to downtown area

By JIM GREENHILL

Staff Writer

The two parking lots on either side of NCNB Plaza are perhaps the ugliest spots in Chapel Hill. Michael Brown has been working to change that since May 15.

Driving up Airport Road into town or along Rosemary Street, it's hard to miss the mural Brown is painting on the back of 109 East Franklin St., home of the Rite Aid Discount Center and Sera-Tec Biologicals.

The mural shows a stylized view of Franklin Street, squeezed so that both sides of the street fit on the wall. The painting is almost entirely in different shades of blue.

"The lady whose idea it was originally thought school kids could do it," said Brown, a Chapel Hill native and graduate of the University.

He was referring to Joan Tetel-Hanks, coordinator of arts education for the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools. She proposed the project to coincide with the May 20 Arts Downtown festival. The Downtown Commission asked Brown to design and paint it.

The commission reviewed Brown's proposals, which included a steamship, a tiger face, the head of a zebra, an abstract color design and an upside down Old Well that he said "would get in every newspaper in the state."

The moonlit view of downtown

was the commission's final choice.

Brown chose the postimpressionist style of pointillism, in which paint is applied in dots and brush strokes in part because he felt it would be easy for the local schoolchildren to execute.

Concerns about insurance prevented the pupils from Guy B. Phillips Junior High School, Grey Culbreth Junior High School and Chapel Hill Senior High School from working above six feet.

So Brown is completing the painting with his brother, Paul, and friend Tim Peck.

"Nobody has been anything but supportive," Brown said. "Nice people from all over town helped."

Brown's work includes sets for off-Broadway plays, book illustrations and medical and architectural renderings.

Adam Cohen, the Daily Tar Heel cartoonist, "participated very heavily," Brown said.

Cohen helped Brown transfer his design from the original sketch to a grid on the wall and made suggestions for changes that Brown included in the final version.

Brown is using high quality latex house paint and predicts that the mural will last 15 years with a protective coating.

Brown would like to paint more murals in Chapel Hill. "I want the back of Memorial Hall," he said. "I've wanted it since I was a freshman."

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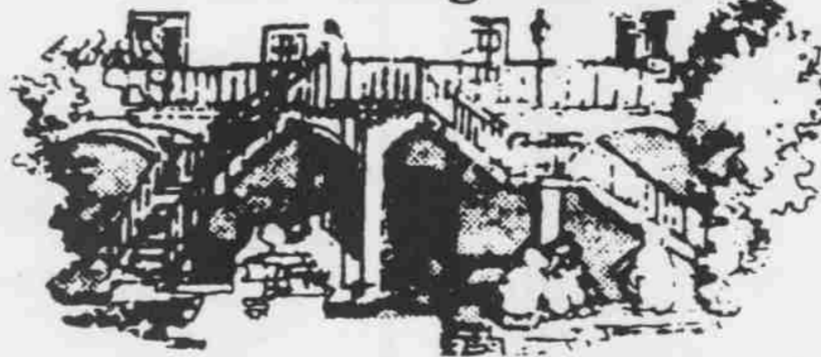
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