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Mural to 'reflect respect for past'

By CHUCK MEYER
Recorder Staff

GREENFIELD — Don't be alarmed if you see a woman staring at a wall near Police Department headquarters on Main Street.



BRAUN-REINITZ

She's not looking for a weak spot to breach the parapets of law enforcement. She's Janet Braun-Reinitz, a muralist from Brooklyn, and she's checking out the 2,500-square-foot cinder block east wall of the Borofsky Building as the site for a huge painting touching on historical and community themes of Greenfield.

"The mural will reflect respect for things past," said Braun-Reinitz, who has done work in the Soviet Union, Nicaragua and Liverpool, England, as well as in American cities.

The painting, sponsored by the Institute for Cultural Understanding in Colrain and the Traprock Peace Center in Deerfield, is designed to evoke the spirit of the community not just in subject matter. Starting on Aug. 14, plans are for it to be created by dozens of residents, skilled and less skilled, directed by Braun-Reinitz. The project should take about three weeks.

"There is a certain Tom Sawyer
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Mural

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aspect in it, but in fact this is very hard physical labor," she said. Initially, the wall will have to be thoroughly washed. People will be needed to set up scaffolding. A skilled calligrapher will be required to paint a list of contributors in a corner of the work. Some will contribute two inches of painting to the work, she said; others will provide "a lot of sweat equity."

Braun-Reinitz returned to Brooklyn Tuesday after familiarizing herself with the setting for the mural, opposite the Veterans' War Memorial, for three days. The space has an "intrinsic dignity," she said, and the theme for the painting will have to be in harmony with that. She said her design will be on view at the Greenfield Library starting July 23. There will be a notebook nearby, in which community residents can write comments and suggestions.

Among those who it is hoped will work on the project are a delegation of young people from Mirgorod in the Ukraine, Greenfield's "sister city" in the Soviet Union, according to Rebekka Tippens, director of the Institute for Cultural Understanding. Tippens is also coordinator of the Pioneer Valley American Soviet Exchange Project, a sponsor of the "sisters cities" program.

Last month the Greenfield Town Council officially accepted Mirgorod as Greenfield's "sister city." Council President Charles J. McCarthy has announced he is going to visit Mirgorod this month with a delegation of Pioneer Valley residents.

In this international aspect of the mural project is the explanation of what brings an artist from a big city to a small town to do a community painting. Tippens has made several trips to the Soviet Union for the exchange project. She met Braun-Reinitz on one of these journeys two years ago when the artist was painting a mural on a Russian bus, and the connection came to fruition in the Greenfield project.

The Mirgorod delegation is scheduled to arrive in Greenfield Aug. 27 and remain for the mural's dedication Sept. 9, Tippens said. She feels working on the project would provide opportunities for increased international understanding, especially if the Soviet youth painted alongside youngsters who have been patronizing Greenfield's After Hours Club. Tippens said Police Chief David McCarthy, co-founder of the teen center, is enthusiastic about the possibility of getting the teens from the club involved. "Lunch hours should

be fun," she said. Donations are being sought for the mural project, which Tippens said will cost \$4,000. Braun-Reinitz is being paid \$2,500, which she said is about half what she usually works for. A fully-funded urban mural in New York City would cost between \$10,000 and \$13,000, she said.

Tippens said Braun-Reinitz has agreed to be responsible for touch-ups and other repairs of the mural for seven years. She said Joel Arnstein of Amherst, owner of the Borofsky Building, has agreed not to paint over the mural for five years.

"Every wall has its own personality," said the muralist, who explained that the urban murals she paints are not the same as those of what she called the "fist and dove school" — the social realism style of

the 1920s in evidence on the sides of some skyscrapers in New York City. "I think they're cliches and propaganda," she said, "and this mural is going to be art."

Braun-Reinitz said she plans to immerse herself in the background of Greenfield by reading "The Conservative Rebel," a thick history of the town by Paul Jenkins. She said she saw no problem in an urban-oriented artist trying to capture the feel or a rural town.

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