University, community team on downtown Hayward Diversity Mural

The City of Hayward has been beautified by a new mural celebrating diversity, nine local high school students have the satisfaction of seeing the fulfillment of a months-long creative process, a local non-profit has the mural they’d been wanting, and a California State University, East Bay professor has furthered her research on the importance of the arts for youth.

The new Diversity Mural on an outside wall of the Community Resources for Independent Living building – just in time for its 30th anniversary, at 439 A St., Hayward is a win-win for all.

The mural was dedicated Friday by CSUEB President Mohammad H. Qayoumi, Hayward Mayor Michael Sweeney, Community Resources for Independent Living Executive Director Sheri Burns, and co-creator Alex Harmon, a Hayward High School student.

It all started when Human Development student Karon Fleming, then a CSUEB employee, wanted to share her passion for painting murals with local teens. A community artist with more than 30-years of experience, she had already worked with a Bay Area youth group to paint the downtown B Street utility boxes for the City of Hayward with various images, including running black stick figures, a sunflower, and a rooster.

Collaborators Christina Chin-Newman, assistant professor of human development, and Sylvia Min, an art department lecturer, funded the project with a CSUEB 2008-09 $6,478 Faculty Support Grant. The City of Hayward contributed by finding the mural site for the project, and finishing the latex image with an anti-graffiti coating.

Nine local students aged 14-18 were selected to participate in the project based on written applications. They met with organizers eight times, including once with Robert Phelps, associate professor of history, to get a sense of murals as an artistic form, learn the area’s history, hone ideas and finally create the 10- by 30-foot giant eye image facing eastbound traffic.

“The students didn’t have to be accomplished artists, but we were looking for a passion for the project,” said Chin-Newman. “I think they learned a lot about community art and grew to realize that an abstract design could be more successful than something explicit. In the end, the mural shows unity through diversity with several people holding up the globe together.”

Chin-Newman, who specializes in studying human development and the arts, found that participants enjoyed meeting people different from themselves and the experience of working together as a team. Min is in the process of editing a book about the Diversity Mural Project.

Helping with the project were CSUEB students Nikki Allamanno and Joseph Duff, seniors in Multimedia Arts; Hayward High students David Aguirre, Alex Harmon, Eric Nunez (whose design was chosen), Maria Rosales and Yvette Ramirez; Castro Valley High students Jackie Ding, Lin Philpott and Darya Zherebnekov; and Leadership Public High (Hayward) student Emmett Richardson, Jr.

Chin-Newman couldn’t be happier with the project, it’s contributions to the participants and to the community, and especially that the design could bring meaning to the resource center’s celebration. She looks around and sees ample opportunity for similar projects, but says private philanthropy is needed in these troubled public funding times.