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Berkshire Community Action Council clothing drive launches with broader campaign



Stephanie VanBramer primes a utility box at Palace Park.

By Dick Lindsay

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PITTSFIELD — Stephanie VanBramer has painted on concrete columns, exterior walls, even an old-school wood and metal classroom chair.

Add a nondescript utility box to her canvas repertoire.

The local artist spent Monday afternoon applying base colors to the large black and gray metal box fronting Palace Park on North Street.

Once the priming is complete, VanBramer will paint a young girl in a mask and cape, paired with the words “This place needs you” and “Remind them why you’re here,” the latter the title of her artwork.

“I wanted an image young kids could look up to and inspire them,” she said.

VanBramer’s public display of creativity is for “Pittsfield Paintbox Project 2016.” The Pittsfield Artscape Committee launched the inaugural artistic competition in February, with 39 artists submitting 59 designs, recently announcing nine winners.

The artists have until July 21 to brighten up eight hardly-noticed, city-owned utility boxes

from the Berkshire Museum on South Street to Persip Park along North Street. The three-dimensional artwork is set to be officially unveiled at July’s Third Thursday festival.

A formal judging panel of downtown business owners and non-participating artists had plenty to consider in picking the winners, according to Pittsfield Artscape Committee Chairman Alex Reczkowski.

“We were looking for originality, bright colors, diversity of themes and designs,” he said.

Berkshire Money Management is the lead sponsor, collaborating with the Artscape Committee to offer artists a \$250 stipend and \$150 toward art supplies per utility box. If permitted, the investment firm on Merrill Road will host the ninth paint box.

The Pittsfield Cultural Council, the city’s Office of Cultural Development, Downtown Pittsfield Inc. and the Berkshire Museum also backing the outdoor public art project.

While new to Pittsfield, paintbox art has been an urban fixtures for years in Boston, Newton and other cities across the country.

“The integration of this kind of art throughout the streets of downtown not only makes for a visually stunning display of creativity, but it also demonstrates what we value as a community,” Mayor Linda M. Tyer said

in prepared remarks. “We are a city that recognizes, celebrates and creates spaces for artistry to thrive in its many forms.”

Pittsfield Artscape is a volunteer-led committee that sponsors, plans and oversees the annual juried exhibition of public art in the city to enhance the downtown and promoting works of art.

Reczkowski said a key goal of paintboxes is to discourage tagging and other vandalism of the utility boxes. If well received, he expects the outdoor community art project to expand beyond the downtown in 2017.

Involved with the mural project in North Adams through the group Art About Town, VanBramer finds painting utility boxes means higher visibility for the artists

“It’s a good way to showcase what you can do,” she said.

Contact Dick Lindsay at 413-496-6233.

Paintbox winners ...

- Artist: Marcel Bova
Title: “Fukushima”
Location: Crowne Plaza
- Artist: Megan Carberry
Title: “Don’t Burst My Bubble”
Location: Berkshire Museum
- Artist: Michael Carty
Title: Untitled (koi)
Location: East Side of Park Square
- Artist: Catarina Cowley
Title: “Popcorn Please!”
Location: Northwest side of Park Square
- Artist: Paul Dodds
Title: Untitled (faces)
Location: Persip Park/Massive Graphics
- Artist: Stacey Healy
Title: “Hands of Hope”
Location: Corner of Depot & North St.
- Artist: Kyle Murray
Title: Untitled (alien, bird, dinosaur)
Location: Corner of North and West streets
- Artist: Stephanie VanBramer
Title: “Remind Them Why You’re Here”
Location: Palace Park