

'DISARM RACISM'



Alma E. Hernandez/Independent

Local artist Jerry Brown outlines a hummingbird as the centerpiece for a "Disarm Racism" mural on Coal Avenue in downtown Gallup Friday. The mural was organized by a group of community volunteers and designed by Brown.

Local artist, volunteers paint downtown street mural

By Christopher S. Pineo
For the Independent

GALLUP — A crowd of volunteers, community members and activists gathered Friday to mark Coal Avenue between Third Street and Second Street in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Before local artist Jerry Brown got to work on the mural that featured a hummingbird, the phrase "Black Lives Matter," and the words "Disarm Racism" on the downtown road, speakers noted how the phrase "Black Lives Matter" could be understood in the context that, in fact, all lives matter.

One speaker noted that while all human life matters, recent events like the May death of George Floyd at the hands of police in Minnesota put the focus on black lives mattering.

When Mona Frazier, a 33-year resident of Gallup, spoke as an African-American woman who said she experienced segregation growing up in Louisiana, she extended the message to those gathered.



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Mona Frazier speaks to community members during the painting of a "Disarm Racism" street mural on Coal Avenue Friday in downtown Gallup.

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ing afforded us after their purchase of \$800,000 more than what the Horsemen Lodge LLC purchased the property for in 2014.

Flagstaff, and hoped a partnership with Horsemen Lodge would help direct more restaurant patrons and passersby

the mission of creating jobs, increasing revenues and stimulating incremental economic development.



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Community members paint a "Disarm Racism" mural on Coal Avenue Friday in downtown Gallup. The mural was organized by a group of community volunteers and designed by local artist Jerry Brown.

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"Your lives matter, because without you, this would not be a good celebration," she said.

Brown gave an explanation of the hummingbird in the mural to the gathered volunteers and community members.

"In a lot of interpretations in other tribes, it's the messenger," he said. "It can see the other side of the world too. My interpretation would be good luck and going forward and start the healing process. Thank you, Gallup."

Organizers for the event said it came together organically between about 25 people who discussed the idea, but a smaller group broke off to solidify plans and completion. Ultimately Rathika Ramadoss, Connie Liu, Lindsey Mingus, Deanna Crask, Jennifer Brostrom Brown, Dee Santillanes, and Kara Smith worked as project organizers to bring together artists, volunteers and painting supplies.

In an interview, Mingus said the lockdown from COVID-19 in Gallup had created a need for the city to come together and heal. She



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Sharna Sutherin, left, and Tera Gambill, right, paint the first strokes of the "Disarm Racism" mural on Coal Avenue Friday in downtown Gallup.

also noted a history of violence from police directed at Native American people in Gallup.

"We have Native Americans in our community that have been hurt by the police, and so there is definitely a big divide

there, and we wanted to show the support for our Native American neighbors and community members," she said.

Smith, who is the executive director of the Gallup MainStreet Arts and Cultural

District, pointed out that local lawyer Barry Klopfer had proposed the idea of the message. She also gave a specific reason why a local private group that recently invited a militia to town during a Black

Lives Matter walk in the community could not add a message to the mural.

"This was a permitted event," she said.

That meant that a message regarding veteran suicide could not be included in the street. Klopfer said that message would have intended to create a false conflict between the intended message of the mural and a message supporting veterans. Ben Welch, community services coordinator for the city of Gallup, had argued with Klopfer about including the message to raise awareness about veteran suicide, but declined to speak on the record regarding the issue.

"This isn't about any one person in Gallup," Klopfer said. "This is about a systemic problem that we in this community are willing to acknowledge and take actions to fix."

Din Yazzie, a Diné youth, appeared at the rally with a group of other youth bearing signs with messages that tied the movement to Native American causes.

"It's time to fight back," she said. "So, that means owing black people reparations. That means giving our land back."