New mural isn’t just OLD NEWS

‘Town Crier’ meant to educate about local history, help revitalize downtown

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The arrival of a large mural imitating a vintage newspaper spread will help revitalize Port Washington’s Main Street and help pedestrians learn about local history, project organizers said.

The 10-foot-tall “Town Crier,” which was 109 feet wide on a wall at the corner of Main Street and North Maryland Avenue, details a timeline of historical events beginning with the year 1644, when Port Washington was settled. At the time, the area was known as Cow Neck.

The $15,000 mural, which was unveiled Nov. 10 and will be permanent, is the latest instillation of local civic group Residents Forward and is funded by private donations.

As municipalities across Long Island struggle to find ways to revitalize their downtowns, artists and organizers said they hope the display boosts foot traffic on Main Street.

“We are always looking for opportunities to bring beauty, vibrancy and walkability to our Main Street,” said Mindy Germain, the organization’s executive director. “One of our goals is to get people out of their cars and to get them walking down our business district.”

Germain said the first two installations — “Welcome To Port Washington” and “Sunset on the Bay” — face each other in an area that used to be a dilapidated building. In between them now stands a small garden with a few benches, on which local artist Michelle Shan painted musical instruments. “I’d like to think of it as we took it from blight to bright,” Germain said.

Diane Luger Moen, a Port Washington graphic artist who designed the mural, said she wanted her work to remind people to pause and connect with their surroundings.

The purpose of the mural, she said, is “to heighten the awareness of the things around us that we take for granted.”

Several of the mural’s seven panels note the stories of landmark buildings that still stand today, including the nearly 300-year-old Thomas Dodge Homestead that housed seven generations of the Dodge family and is on the National Register of Historic Places, and how ice-skating on Baxter Pond was once a popular pastime.

“These are the sort of things that we see every day in our community, but they were alive in a very different way back in the day,” Moen said. The panels “are just little sound bites of information. But hopefully it will go a long way to resonate with people today and the future.”

Damon Gersh, a Port Washington resident and the mural’s main donor, said the artwork will help people connect with the past. “It’s a celebration of who we are and where we come from,” he said.

Chris Bain, president of the Cow Neck Peninsula Historical Society, walked past the mural last Monday before catching a train to his job in Manhattan.

“There are not that many places where you can find local history,” said Bain, whose organization helped select the mural’s design. “It’s a wonderful thing. . . . It’s going to be a conversation piece in town.”

Project manager Michelle Shain, left, and artists Diane Luger Moen and Jason Diaz.

ARTFULLY DONE

- The murals, which each cost between $10,000 and $35,000, are funded primarily through private donations.
- The first two murals face each other on 5 Main St.
- The third mural, “Remembering the Unforgettable,” is on the wall of Deluxe Transportation off Main Street.
- The latest mural, “Town Crier,” is on the wall of Baltimore Design Center at 35 Main St.