

June 2010

Photos Below Story

Watershed Wall Unveiled on June 4

On Friday, June 4, a large crowd participated in the unveiling of the “Watershed Wall”, a public art collaboration between the Ithaca City School District (ICSD) art teachers, students and the City of Ithaca. This clay mural, donated to the city, will be permanently on display on the back wall of the Green Street Parking Garage Alley.

The Watershed Wall was created by ICSD students based on a collaborative design by their art teachers. The project was coordinated by the Fine Arts Booster Group, an affiliate of IPEI (Ithaca Public Education Initiative), and assembled with assistance by artist Annemarie Zwack. All schools participated in the clay tile making or in a corresponding lake and stream study.

The large fifty-five foot mural is an organic rendering of Ithaca’s creeks feeding Cayuga Lake. Using clay tiles stained in earth tones to represent the land and local lake stones to represent the water, the mural materials themselves echo the natural beauty of the area.

Martha Frommelt, president of the Fine Arts Booster Group (FABG), welcomed the attendees and introduced speakers while thanking them for their key roles in the project: Mayor Carolyn Peterson, City Engineer Tom West, Chair of the City’s Public Art Commission Terry Plater, and Belle Sherman art teacher Sarah Locke. Plaques installed at either end of the mural recognize the supporters and collaborators.

“Without the City’s support and vision for the arts, this project would not be possible,” said Frommelt who also lead the ribbon cutting ceremony featuring ICSD Board of Education President Rob Ainslie, IPEI Vice President Jennifer Engel, Ithaca Downtown Alliance Director Gary Ferguson, City of Ithaca Public Works’ JoAnn Cornish and Brooks Hendrix, mural artist Zwack, and several ICSD art teachers and students.

Candace Shoemaker, another lead volunteer with the Fine Arts Boosters, explained: “Two years ago when I walked by, what was then a blank wall and thought about the possibility of a public art project by the students of Ithaca City School District, I had absolutely no idea that its making would become a gigantic community collaboration. This is one of those really rare events in life when the size of the final product has a direct relationship to the number of people involved. We know that as much as one and half tons of clay, lake stones, grout, and wood hang from these bricks and we think that as many as 1500 pairs of hands have contributed their skills and inspiration to the Watershed Wall. I feel great pride in our accomplishment and in the collaborative spirit that defines Ithaca. Thank you to everyone who played a part, large or small, in making this happen. I'd like to extend my personal thanks to Martha for her tireless dedication and willingness to step into any breach and do whatever was needed, whenever it was needed.”

The project represents community collaboration by the ICSD, FABG, and the City and lead volunteers Frommelt and Shoemaker with support from the City of Ithaca Department of Public Works and Public Art Commission, Ithaca Public Education Initiative, the Service League, Tompkins Trust Company, Tim Merrick Construction, Finger Lakes Fabricating, All Stone and Tile, Cayuga Lumber, Cayuga Floating Classroom and the Strebel Community Enrichment Fund of the Community Foundation of Tompkins County.

The FABG supports all the arts for all the kids. FABG strives to foster appreciation for the arts, advocate for the arts, and improve learning opportunities for all. FABG is an affiliate of IPEI, a community based not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization that develops supportive community and private sector relationships with the Ithaca City School District. For more information, visit www.ipei.org or www.fabgithaca.org . To support the arts, please visit the website or contact the boosters.



Figure 1 Terry Plater congratulates all the collaborators who created this public art that connects with Ithaca's natural setting.



Figure 2 Mayor Peterson cuts the ribbon with ICSD and City participants' assistance.



Figure 3 As soon as the tarp was lowered, attendees approached the Wall to touch it; student artists found their tiles, too.