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FEATURED

# Pathfinders begin mural in honor of Gillette

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Margaret Kariuki, community service supervisor from Calgary in Alberta, Canada, works on a mural with the pathfinders on the side of the Gillette Fire Department fleet maintenance building on Tuesday in Gillette.

News Record Photo/Luke Johnson

On Tuesday afternoon, about 40 Canadian Pathfinders laid the first paint strokes on a mural designed to honor the history of the Cowboy State and Gillette's legacy.

The unfinished three-panel, 5-by-50 foot painting is hanging on the Campbell County Fire Station's fleet maintenance building. The paint by numbers style of stencils mapping out the colors of the mural will be filled out by Thursday.

Pathfinders from the Cimarrons Pathfinder club, based in Calgary, picked out colors from baskets of paint cups — 60 in total, filled with 35 different colors — labeled with the numbers corresponding to the areas of the mural needing that color.

When it's finished, the mural will feature a sheep wagon, a band of charging horses, and coal hauling machinery. Four more Pathfinder groups are slated to continue working on the mural throughout the week, picking up where the Cimarrons Pathfinders left off today.

"They did a pretty good job," said Brandon Coutain, 27, one of the club's drill instructors. "We had to stop them because they'd stay here and finish the mural, but we have to have other groups come here and experience this."

Before painting, Rockpile Museum educator Heather Rodriguez gathered the Pathfinders for a history lesson on the scenes included in the mural. For instance: there were six million sheep in Campbell County in 1908, and at the time, they were more valuable than even beef.

The six horses in the center of the image are a reference to the first horses documented in Wyoming; Radiocarbon dating performed by the University of Wyoming shows Native Americans were first using horses as early as 1640. The horses also represent the biblical story of God creating animals from Genesis 6.

“The subject matter is all about Wyoming and Campbell County. It was all done to honor Gillette,” Rodriguez said.

Another club instructor, Presly Ann John, 33, said it was great to see the Pathfinders “dig deep” and enjoy an activity less labor-intensive than the gardening and cleaning volunteer jobs they’ll be taking on throughout the week, especially after an exhausting trip into Wyoming over the weekend.

“It was awesome to see our kids just engaging, a lot of kids said it was therapeutic and calming,” John said. “There was no hesitation, doubt, or questions about it.”

Rodriguez has been developing the mural project for the past three years, designing the scene that’ll face Second Street for the foreseeable future as well as the logistics of the project.

Blowing up the scene designed for the mural to fit the three panels was challenging. Rodriguez said she was quoted \$25,000 by Paintillo for the stenciled image and painting supplies, but with the help of donations from local businesses and SignBoss’ printing services, she was able to bring costs down to \$4,000.

Rodriguez said the mural project did face some resistance during development. The mural was originally set to hang on another building in town, but around Christmastime the owner of the building told the Pathfinders that Rodriguez couldn’t pull it off, she said.

“This came out of someone saying I couldn’t do it,” Rodriguez said. “That’s the cowboy way isn’t it?”

Gillette residents can stop by the Fire Station facility throughout the week to check out the Pathfinder’s progress.

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Susan Monaghan