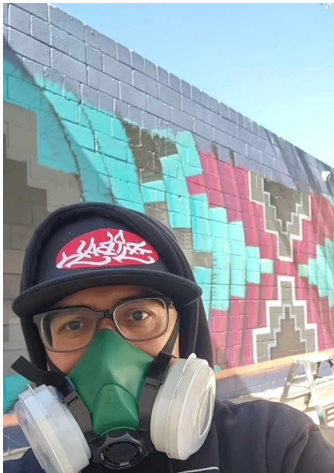


Bringing a pop of color to Gallup

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Managing Editor
Friday, 02 February 2024 00:00



Walking through downtown Gallup, a person can see a wide number of murals showing off artists' talents. But one that popped up in the past six months has a special story.

In 2021, the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce held a class for community members called Leadership McKinley. Participants were encouraged to pick a project they could complete within five months. This served as their capstone project.

One group comprised of Gallup's Planning Manager Nikki Lee and Four Corner's Detox Recovery Center's Operations Manager Maura Schanefelt, MPA, decided to focus on

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beautifying downtown Gallup by hiring artists to create murals.

And Schanefelt thought she knew the perfect artist: a man named Jason Kinlicheenie. Kinlicheenie was a part of a group of artists who painted a mural to honor Wake Self, a New Mexico hip hop artist who died in November 2019 due to a drunk driver.

Kinlicheenie first partnered with Schanefelt and Lee on a mural on Coal Avenue. That was completed in August 2022. Almost a year later, Lee noticed another spot that she thought needed some color: the side of the building at 107 W. Aztec Ave.

“It just wasn’t nice, and it was one of the main places everyone sees in Gallup. I work at city hall, so I saw it every day and it just looked awful,” Lee said in an interview with the *Sun*.

KINLICHEENIE’S BACKGROUND

Unlike other, more traditional artists who use acrylic or oil, Kinlicheenie uses spray paint. This allows him to really play with color.

“My art is really colorful, and Gallup doesn’t have that much color. Even with the murals that are already up, they’re just kind of bland. They still look awesome, but there’s hardly any color in Gallup. ... When you come across my murals it brightens up the atmosphere,” the artist said.

Schanefelt believes that Kinlicheenie’s murals may even change people’s perspectives on street art.

“Jason uses spray paint and all these different colors and the way he does it is just really really

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neat,” Schanefelt said. “I think [it also helps with] the narrative of graffiti from something really negative to something that’s really positive. The cool thing is folks who are in that realm usually, they respect each other’s art, so they’re not going to put anything on [Jason’s art] because they’re respecting that he created that.”

Kinlicheenie admitted that this second mural was a bit difficult for him to create. After priming the wall, he stared at it, wondering if he could tackle this huge project by himself. But then he looked over, and saw a black window hanging out on the wall.

In Native American culture, black widows symbolize creativity, so Kincheenie took the sight of the animal as a sign that he could accomplish the task in front of him.

His mural at 107 W. Aztec Ave. is an abstract piece featuring a Navajo basket and a Navajo rug, entitled “An Ode to the Weavers.”

Kinlicheenie said he’s inspired by his family. He comes from a family of artists: his dad works with leather and his uncles are painters and sketch artists.

He grew up traveling with his uncles, who were Diné medicine men. His art includes the songs, stories, and prayers he grew up listening to.

Kinlicheenie said his favorite part about doing murals around town is seeing people’s reactions to his pieces.

“A lot of people are dealing with things in their own lives and when they see my art, it just brightens up their day and makes them feel good,” he said.

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