

Painting in public

Retired WSU art instructor working on mural in Pullman's Pine Street Plaza

By Hillary Hamm Daily News staff writer

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Patrick Siler hasn't painted anything in 10 years.

That's about to change.

The 69-year-old Pullman man is dusting off his paint brushes and going to work on an 18-foot-by-20-foot mural in downtown Pullman's Pine Street Plaza.

"I wanted to do a bigger painting. I wanted to do something outdoors, something public," said the retired Washington State University art instructor. "I'm just doing this for a new opportunity."

Siler began to prep the side of the building, which houses Lily Bee's Consignment Shop and a now-vacant Internet cafe, about three weeks ago. He said it took some time and patience to scrape, fill in cracks and give two 20-foot-tall wall panels a base coat of robin-egg blue paint.

He began to sketch the outline of the mural in charcoal Wednesday. The mural will be anchored by a small-town streetscape with a diamond shop, tavern and divorce attorney's office, along with two couples at tables playing checkers and solitaire.

Converging on the scene are sea turtles and sea horses, which are favorites of Siler's wife, Liz.

He said the mural is an accumulation of images that have been on his mind.

"It's imaginative and whimsical. It's supposed to be an entertaining and thought-provoking image," he said. "Does it mean anything? I'll leave that to you."

He plans to incorporate bright reds, Aztec-inspired aquas and other vivid hues into the mural. In addition to fueling his own creativity, Siler said the mural also is about providing art to the community.

"The audience for contemporary art for many decades has been narrow," he said. "Most people, even if they're university educated, have very little contact with art."

Pullman Arts Commission Chairwoman Anna Maria Shannon said she's pleased with Siler's progress, and is glad to have more public art in town.

"Whatever we offer to the public artistically is important," she said. "It's a chance to educate people and facilitate discussion on art. We want to support the arts as much as we can."

Shannon said Siler and the building's owner, Moon Lee, coordinated on the mural design. The Arts Commission helped get a roughly \$1,000 tourism grant through the Pullman Chamber of Commerce to rent the lift Siler will need to reach the high parts of his piece in the coming months.

Shannon said it's nice to see more work being done to spruce up the plaza, which is now the center of many community events.

"We want to make it inviting and enriching for people when they're walking downtown," she said.

Siler had hoped to have the mural complete for the National Lentil Festival in August, but a few setbacks have pushed back his target date.

"I've got three more months of good weather. I'll be out here every day. I'll work really hard," he said.

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