



PRESS PHOTOS/WENDE ALEXANDER CLARK

Students work together on an Egyptian mosaic, left, for the Baxter Community Center multicultural project. Nicole Cimoch, 11, above, paints glaze on a tile.

Kids learn about teamwork by creating mural

FRIDAY

THE BAXTER COMMUNITY CENTER MURAL will be unveiled at a public reception from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Friday at the center, 935 Baxter St. SE.

By Joel C. Carrier
The Grand Rapids Press

A new mural designed to encourage multiculturalism and acceptance will be unveiled Friday at Baxter Community Center.

But the mural's lesson is not limited to the images from diverse cultures represented in its tiled design; the real lesson is in the mural's creation.

The 5-foot by 10-foot mural was created through the teamwork of 17 students from a variety of schools and ethnic groups.

Spirit of harmony

"It's something to show people that everyone can get along, and that by working together we can accomplish anything," says 12-year-old Nicole Cimoch, who will be a seventh-grader at Sheridan Trail school in Rockford and was one of the mural's creators.

Area artist Eugenia D. Marve devised the multicultural tile-making workshop to improve communication and team building skills for participants from diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds.

The workshop was funded by the Grand Rapids Community College Pre-Summer Programs. Area students of all ages, socio-economic levels and ethnic backgrounds were selected to participate based on individual merit.

"It's a comprehensive learning experience," says Elias Lumpkins, dean of student services for GRCC. "They're learning about

art, they're learning about the paints they're working with . . . and they learn about and interact with one another."

In the week-long workshop, the students viewed slides and studied various cultures before drawing their designs. Then, as a team, they selected six of the images to be included in the mural.

The six images, representing various cultures, were enlarged with an overhead projector so the students could transfer a portion of each design onto 6-inch tiles.

The students painted the tiles which were then fired and fitted together like a jigsaw puzzle to create their overall mural design.

"The mural is actually the concrete finished product that will be there long after the students have gone on to their careers, to their married lives," Lumpkins says.

"This event . . . provides an avenue for open discussion of racial issues and individual importance in making the world a better place," says Marve who taught the workshop. A teacher for the Grand Rapids Public School System, Marve has created similar murals for D&W corporate headquarters and Grand Rapids Public Schools. She has taught similar workshops in Benton Harbor and Battle Creek.

Making a difference

"The purpose is to educate about other cultures but also to discuss and to educate about the importance of individual responsibility," she says. "It is particularly important in today's society to provide youth greater opportunities for participation and understanding of their value to our communities. By accepting and celebrating these murals, we are saying that their voices do matter."

Alex Richardson, 13, was



Artist Eugenia Marve instructs students in tile glazing. At left is Alex Richardson, 14, and at right is Anne Clocklin, 13.

selected by his school art teacher.

"I learned that we're all the same and we might look different and be different, but we're all the same inside," says Richardson who will be a ninth-grader at

Riverside Middle School.

For Cimoch, the experience transcended all boundaries.

"I learned that you shouldn't choose people by their color and that you should look at everyone and just try to make friends with everybody," she says. "Lots of people just say all white people are bad because they're skinheads and that all black people are bad because they kill people. I think it's just important to tell people that everybody's not that way."

Important message

Cimoch feels the mural is also a powerful example of the difference people of her generation can make.

"I think kids should try to get into more activities to help the community out, because it's important to show people that we can make a difference," says Cimoch.

Program participants included: Shannon Bajema, Daryoush Brooks, Shannon Callahan, Hope Casler, Nicole Cimoch, Anne Clocklin, Steven Darkins, Andrew Gerken, Thurston King, Julie Maslowski, Terrance McGehee, Jackie Mick, Shawn Minard, Elias Ortiz, Julie Pallas, Alex Richardson and Michael Walker.