

A new 'opening' appears where it is least expected

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BY: Holly Sow/ Editor

Globe — The Gila County Juvenile Detention Center in Globe is not known for being a place to visit. Those detained behind the facility's gray and white walls have little color to brighten their day aside from one lively classroom in the heart of the building and the bright orange plastic shoes they wear on their feet. That is about to change, though, thanks to joint efforts of the Gila County Juvenile Detention Center staff, educators, and a college art teacher.

Kathy Coker of the juvenile detention center staff explained that over a year ago, the idea was born to involve the detainees in an art project which would bring more color into the facility. After many discussions and working out the fine details, Gila Community College art instructor, Larry Brown, was asked to lead the artistic portion of the project. Brown is the head of the art department at GCC and has been an instructor for 23 years. "I've worked with a lot of kids," Brown noted. On this project, Brown will guide the juvenile detainees in painting a large mural on the wall of the courtyard.

The mural, designed by Brown, incorporates landscape from the high desert area of southern Gila County and the Rim country scenery of northern Gila County. "We wanted something cool, calming, serene," explained Coker.

Originally, the juveniles, who attend between four to eight hours of school daily, were allowed to get creative, sketching ideas for the mural. While the detention facility offers no art class curriculum, Mr. Chandra Shekhar, who teaches the juveniles, said that students were encouraged to "create their own view on the piece of paper. He said some of the students who have come through the doors are "born artists." Ultimately, however, it was decided that the mural should depict something that everyone who spends time at the facility can connect with. Coker said the landscape mural was selected since it was "fluid, something everyone can relate to."

Last Tuesday, the project got underway. The juveniles were introduced to both the artist and a sketch of the proposed mural during afternoon classes.

Later that evening, the artist went with the juveniles into the courtyard and set up projectors to cast the outlines of the mural on the wall. Together, they all traced the landscape onto the white wall.

Brown noted, "We will make it appear like an opening in the wall, using depth perception to 'open' the wall."

Coker explained that the project is not only a chance for the juveniles to get outside and do something different, it also their way to leave their mark in a positive way. The juveniles also have the opportunity to earn incentive reward points for participating in the project.

While some of the students were a little hesitant at first about the possibility of "messing it up," Brown reminded everyone that "art is one of those areas where almost all students can experience success."

When the day came to add the first color, however, all the students were happy to participate despite the heat of the early morning sun. The very well-mannered young men listened attentively as the college instructor described the steps involved, and then they went to work together, taping up borders and painting in details.

In all, five juveniles took part in the project. Brown was also assisted by his son, also an artist, who was home on college break.



Holly Sow/ Arizona Silver Belt

GCC art instructor Larry Brown displays the sketch of the mural that will soon add color to the juvenile detention center in Globe. Together with his son and the juvenile detainees, the mural will provide an "opening" in an otherwise very colorless world for the young detainees.