

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: JAN 16, 2024
FOUR NEW MURALS IN COUNCIL BLUFFS

COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA - The City of Council Bluffs, in collaboration with the Iowa West Foundation, proudly announces the completion of four murals along the FIRST AVE trail. Local artists have lent their creative talents to transform the FIRST AVE corridor into a vibrant canvas, adding a new dimension to the landscape.

The FIRST AVE mural project is part of a larger initiative to activate public spaces and foster community engagement. Administered by the City of Council Bluffs, the murals received generous financial support from the Iowa West Foundation.

"The new murals are outstanding, particularly in the way each of them uniquely showcases the history and pride that define our community," said Brenda Mainwaring, President and CEO of Iowa West Foundation. "The FIRST AVE mural project takes this new recreational corridor to another level and creates a showcase of Council Bluffs' creativity and expression for residents and visitors alike."

The four murals are strategically placed along the FIRST AVE trail, each telling its own unique story. The locations and respective artists are as follows:

Artist Betni Kalk painted "Rails to Trails: Evolution of Transportation" on the trail-facing wall at 15 S. 20th Street. Kalk's mural illustrates the Loess Hills under sunny skies, showcasing the building's evolution from a train maintenance facility to a car maintenance center through depictions of various modes of transportation. Celebrating the trail, the artwork features a cyclist, a walker with a dog, and children on scooters. "This mural is meant to brighten its viewer's day, especially on a cold gray winter day when the bright colors remind them that spring will be coming soon," said Kalk. The mural comprises eight sections, three adorned with wildflowers, a monarch, and a bee, making them ideal backdrops for family photos, senior portraits, and selfies.

Artist Weston Thomson painted "Dream Builder" on the trail-facing wall at 29 S. 21st Street. Thomson's mural narrates the extraordinary life of John Roth, this building's owner and local home builder. The mural pays homage to the trade industry by synthesizing architectural drawings, symbolic trade tools, and purposeful colors. Incorporating "lefty" and "500" represents Roth's ambidextrous legacy and the houses he built. "This mural stands as a testament to history and contemporary expression, honoring the past and embodying the vibrant spirit of the present Council Bluffs community," said Thomson.

Artist Dany Reyes painted "Empowering Youth for Global Change" on the Cochran Park facing wall at 2200 2nd Ave. Reyes' mural portrays a diverse range of children engaged in impactful and positive activities, symbolizing their collective contributions to the world. "My children were my inspiration behind this mural, and I specifically chose and admired this location because my children go to school right next door, and it directly faces Cochran Park, where they have spent a significant amount of their childhood," said Reyes. The mural hones in on the power of children and their ability to impact the world.

Artist Ilaamen Pelshaw painted “The Fabric of Council Bluffs” on the trail-facing wall at 3415 West Broadway. Pelshaw’s mural intricately weaves bold colors and geometric patterns to represent the city’s rich history. Highlighting significant elements such as the "WRL" radio tower and an authentic WRL Galaxy 300 Radio from 1964, the mural tributes the World Radio Laboratories that once operated in the same building. “While any part of the mural can be used for a distinct and colorful photo backdrop, if you stand next to the quote bubble, it can appear you're saying “Council Bluffs,” said Pelshaw. Notable symbols include the Golden Spike, Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge, Looking Up, the Loess Hills, the Missouri River, and a historic Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway car.

The mural project's success is a testament to the collaborative spirit between local artists, the City of Council Bluffs, and the Iowa West Foundation. Together, they have transformed the FIRST AVE corridor into a dynamic and inspiring destination.

"Completing the FIRST AVE mural project marks a significant milestone for Council Bluffs. These murals not only beautify our city but also reflect the unique character of our community," said Council Bluffs Mayor Matt Walsh. "I am grateful for the partnership with the Iowa West Foundation and the dedicated artists who brought these buildings to life."

Residents and visitors alike are invited to explore the FIRST AVE corridor and experience the beauty and diversity of the new murals. The City of Council Bluffs is planning a public event to celebrate the murals this spring. Visit councilbluffs-ia.gov for details.

Artists and partners are available for interviews upon request. Please contact Ashley Kruse, Communications and Events Manager, City of Council Bluffs, 712-328-9000