



South Avondale mural offers hope and sense of pride: November 2020?

Description



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Students at **South Avondale Elementary School (North Avondale's neighborhood school)** can now get an important life lesson in a place you might least expect: on the school playground. In a matter of two weeks, Brent Billingsley and Michael Coppage transformed a white concrete wall into something spectacular. It's easy to see the two Cincinnati Children's team members have a passion for art and the community. The mural, you can't miss it. Its bold and bright and catches your attention for many reasons. With strokes of expert artistry and a whole lot of love, the duo have provided a gift to the students of South Avondale Elementary and the community. "For me it's perpetuating our history, telling stories that could be scrubbed from history if we don't continue to tell them," said Coppage. The mural features the late Cincinnati Vice Mayor Marian Spencer and community leader and former South Avondale Elementary School teacher, William Joel McCray. Both have roots in Avondale. One end of the mural shows the leaders as children, the other end shows them as adults. And in the middle a jungle, to illustrate their struggle. "Once they understand who these people are and what they've done, I'd like for them to see themselves in the children, and understand that you have to go through some things in life to be the people we all hope to be recognized by history, respected and accomplished," Coppage said. Billingsley and Coppage both work with patients at the College Hill campus, using art as therapy for children who are dealing with trauma and mental health challenges. "When patients are zoned in and working on a project, it's refreshing to see them just be in the moment that's when they open up and start telling you everything. They'll start draining off some emotions," Billingsley said. In this case though, Billingsley and Coppage are the ones who poured out their emotions onto a concrete canvas. A labor of love. The community sent that love right back. At various stages of the project, children of all ages showed up to see how they could help. In some cases, creating their own art with sidewalk chalk. "We love it. We want the community to feel a sense of ownership. This is for everyone to enjoy and find inspiration. It's special, knowing that this mural is at an elementary school makes me very, very happy," said Billingsley. The final touches on the mural will come from students at South Avondale Elementary who will put handprints on a section of the wall, so they can make their own mark.

The mural project is part of the Reds Community Makeover, a partnership with the Cincinnati Reds, Cincinnati Children's, Proctor and Gamble, the Cincinnati Zoo and others. Most of the community projects are on hold until 2021, due to COVID-19. This is the second major project for Billingsley and Coppage. Both worked on the Black Lives Matter mural in downtown Cincinnati. If you get a chance, stop by to see the mural at South Avondale Elementary. It's worth the trip to see how paint on a concrete wall is creating a sense of community pride and hope.

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