

## Joy, color, and community on display in Devens

by Jen Manell · Friday, August 16, 2024

The first public preview of the “Devens Intersection of Communities and Cultures” mural was held Wednesday, Aug. 7, at Willard Field Complex (near the junction of Antietam Street and Sherman Avenue). The full design was displayed on an easel next to where the mural in progress was mapped out on paved ground where walking paths intersect. Residents and families gathered to paint parts of the mural designed by Fitchburg artist Shara Osgood.

The project was funded by New England Foundation for the Arts and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council’s Arts and Culture Department. According to the Devens Enterprise Commission, the goals of the project include the advancement and support of public art and the use of art as a tool for place-making; to activate an underused recreational area; to attract visitors to notice the space and reflect on Devens’ cultural and community identity and engage with the art and the space; and to bring joy, color, beauty, a sense of belonging, and hope.



From left: Zoey and Trinity Schaefer-Richard, Livia Tada, and Lynna Boivin paint mural sections at the Community Paint Party Aug. 7 at Willard Field, Devens. (Photos by Jen Manell)

DEC and MassDevelopment chose the theme “Intersections of Communities and Culture” and worked with a volunteer committee to select a winner from 18 artists’ proposals. Osgood described the way in which she gathered ideas for the mural design. “We did

listening sessions and talked with the community about what was important to them and what they love about Devens, and we represented it all in this design.” Osgood told the DEC, “Murals are the people’s art. I have been invited into spaces to transform them into memorable backdrops for people’s lives. My work is designed to uplift and reflect a community’s best self back to them, bring hope in dark times, and amplify the message and values of that community.”

Osgood’s design depicts intersections by weaving pops of color shifts and symbolism. The mural is painted on the ground on a literal intersection of pathways. “It’s a lot of different pathways that people can actually walk upon. You could come in and walk a path, and then, when you get to an intersection, you can take a different direction. So we’re hoping that kids will actually interact with it in that way,” Osgood said.

The artist added, “There are a lot of symbols.” An otter on the top left represents family, playfulness, and the Nashua River. A Zuni sun and eagle are both symbols of Indigenous people, and the eagle does double duty representing an infantry that was once at Fort Devens. A butterfly represents beauty and transformation, along with vines and growth portraying the pocket forest and concerns for the environment. Dynamic keys break up the border toward the right of the design, representing startups, industry, and growth. Stars illustrate five-star generals along with everyday people working toward their highest potential.



Wesley McGinnis shows off the section of mural he’s working on while dad Kevin McGinnis looks on and assists.

Painters of many generations made their mark at the painting party, which added yet another layer of intersectionality and community building. The artist's children, Ethan and Lore Osgood, assisted with setup, established the tone with upbeat music, and worked at the paint booth helping to get the right colors to the right painters for the right sections. Before the paint party, Osgood primed the area and, using math and geometry, blocked out the design. She then painted borders on each section so painters of all abilities could participate—with or without a steady hand.

Osgood and her team of assistants and mentees will add finer details, animals, patterns, and symbols over the next several weeks. The project will be worked on through September. To see the work in progress, the United Native American Cultural Center/Devens playground lot offers the closest parking. A ribbon-cutting celebration will take place upon completion.