

THE GREAT WALLS of Winnipeg

CHINA may have the Great Wall, but at last count, Winnipeg had more than 400 great walls.

And the tally continues to tick upward as a battalion of scaffold soldiers, enlisted by community organizations, wield spray guns and paintbrushes to battle the bland anonymity of bare-naked buildings.

In the west end, where the slogan is "We are the world," some 32 buildings wear coats of the many colours that can be found in this multicultural community. Another dozen are being outfitted.

"I'm kind of passionate about murals," says Trudy Turner, West End BIZ executive director, who's shooting for about 300.

"Our goal is that every wall that can hold a mural will have a mural."

The BIZ only hires local artists to deck its walls, according to two themes: multiculturalism and local heroes/famous people.

Funding comes from the BIZ, business owners, Take Pride Winnipeg and Neighbourhoods Alive!, Manitoba's long-term strategy to support and encourage community-driven revitalization. Turner says the murals generally cost about \$10 a square foot.

In the coming months, artists, summer students and volunteers will create likenesses of aboriginal actor Adam Beach, filmmaker Guy Maddin and the late "dumpster diver" Walter Zielke-Reusch.

Zielke-Reusch, Turner says, was a mentally challenged handyman who retrieved and repaired whatever items he could find and gave them away to people in the neighbourhood. He died last year, at age 76.

"Anyone who grew up in the west end over the last 50 years knew Zookhy."

To take a self-guided walking tour of west end murals, pick up your passport, which contains photos and a map, at the BIZ office (563 Ellice.)

Mural specialists painting the town... beautiful

THE behemoth boa constrictor sunning himself on the east wall of Pet Traders and stopping traffic on Portage Avenue is for your eyes only. He's not an advertisement for the pet store, whose stock is restricted to things small, furry and feathered.

The snake — along with the tree frogs, sloth and butterflies — resides within the 2,100 square-foot Amazon forest, squeezed out of the imagination and paint tubes of mural specialists Mandy van Leeuwen, 23, and Jennifer Johnson-Pollock, 26.

When we met them in the shade of the jungle foliage, the owners of Utopian Art Design were putting finishing touches on the mural — their 25th in the city — using paintbrushes as fine as those found in a child's paintbox.

Their snake's-eye-view of Amazon life is the result of about 200 hours of work, often in the searing sun.

This ain't paint-by-numbers, folks.

"We basically take a one-inch grid and turn it into a one-foot grid on the wall," van Leeuwen explains.

"We projected it at night (remember the overhead projector from school?) from the middle of Valour Road."

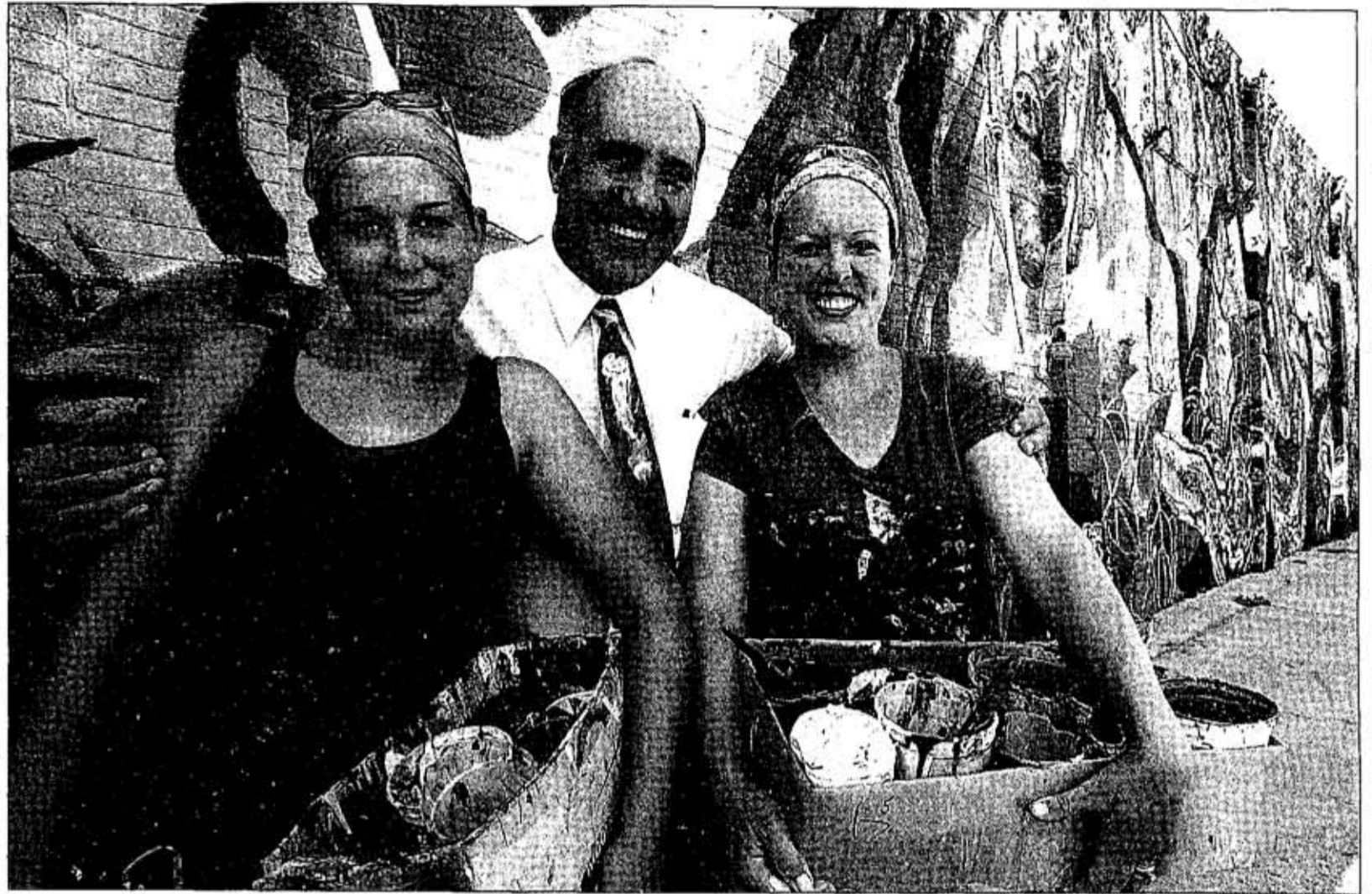
These outdoor designing women have already completed three murals this summer: a red macaw at 546 Sargent Ave., a herd of galloping horses on an Elm Street back lane, and a plywood piece that will be installed on the Osborne Street underpass later this month.

Believe it or not, there are mural



Carolin & friends

Carolin Vesely



Mural painters Mandy van Leeuwen, left, and Jennifer Johnson-Pollock with Tom Ethans by the mural project at Pet Traders on Portage Ave.

groupies.

"We have people who will follow us from mural to mural," Johnson-Pollock says.

Last year, the duo sought the assistance of insulated tarps and portable heaters to complete a 1,080-square-foot mural of Portuguese dancers — in November.

Johnson-Pollock and van Leeuwen, in collaboration with fellow muralist Charlie Johnston, were also the creative hands behind the 2002 "Copper Girl" masterpiece (Welcome to Downtown Winnipeg) at Main and Higgins.

The city's new 3,500-square-foot landmark was voted Mural of the Year by transplanted Winnipegger Bob Buchanan on his Web site, www.themuralsofwinnipeg.com

Painting the town with pride

Tom Ethans, executive director of Take Pride Winnipeg!, says the city's 1991 non-profit cleanup and beautification project has commissioned 125 murals in the past five years.

When Ethans started with TPW in 1997, the focus was on muralizing underpasses.

"It's just grown exponentially from there," he says. "The quality has increased dramatically."

Murals, he says, showcase local talent and the city's past and present, give youths a chance to learn about and appreciate art, and have proven to prevent graffiti.

Ethans walks his art talk.

Each of his 38 ties, has been hand-painted by his children, Jennifer, 15, and Jordan, 12. In the photo above he's

wearing a tie featuring Jennifer's abstract designs — at least that was her style at age 2.

Grade 7 Samaritan donates hair to cancer patients

SO focused has Amy Gnutel been on her long, flowing locks during the past few years, that mom says her daughter had taken to hauling out her ruler after every wash to monitor hair growth.

But this 11-year-old girl is far from vain.

In fact, Amy beamed from her chair in Singleton's St. Boniface hair salon on Tuesday when stylist Monique Normand-Wagner handed her her eight-inch, golden-brown braid.

Hair today, gone tomorrow — to a Toronto organization that makes wigs for young cancer patients who lose their tresses during treatment.

The Grade 7 student, who now sports a chin-length bob, says her grandparents inspired her decision to donate her locks.

"My grandpa and grandma both had cancer and they both survived," Amy says. (Grandpa actually beat it twice.)

"I thought this would be a good thing. I think it might make the kids happy because it'll give them better self-esteem until their hair grows out."

Amy's dad Don, who works for CP Rail, also donated his hair — a lesser sacrifice than his daughter's — last year for the Cuts for the Cure cancer fund-raiser.

"I think that kind of got the ball rolling," mom Michelle says.

Amy's parents are understandably proud of her selfless, self-initiated contribution.

But frankly, Amy says she was a bit embarrassed by the photo-snapping fanfare that surrounded this simple snip-and-style.

"It's all kind of weird," she says, "my mom calling a newspaper. I didn't want it to be a big show-off thing."

Oh well, the salon wasn't very busy, providing ample room for us and our paparazzi, a reporter from the St. Boniface French newspaper, two representatives from the Canadian Cancer Society, and Amy's parents, grandma and cousin.

Amy Gnutel, 11, cut off her braid to help make wigs for young cancer patients.

"I'm just here just to support, just to say thank you," said Lynne Billings, CCS executive director. "I think it's a wonderful thing."

Amy didn't get ALL the attention.

In honour of the occasion, she presented everyone in attendance with a homemade Chia pet — a bald, funny-faced head crafted from a sawdust-and-seed-stuffed nylon which, with time and water will sprout its own head of grassy hair.

Normand-Wagner says Singleton's has an arrangement to send donations such as Amy's to organizations that make wigs for cancer patients.

Such organizations include:

- Wigs for Kids in St. Catherine's, Ont (905) 937-1934
- Continental Hair in Toronto (416) 923-7747
- Eva & Co. Wigs Inc. in Vancouver (1-800-839-2917)

The perfect storm of newspaper clichés

The Perfect Storm (starring George Clooney, 2000) was far from a perfect movie, but the meteorological metaphor that inspired it is reportedly still gaining force as a journalistic cliché.

In the last year, the *New York Times* printed it 11 times, the *Chicago Tribune* 47 times, the *Washington Post* 54 times — and the *Los Angeles Times* 65 times, according to an article in the *L.A. Times*.

Examples: SARS is a perfect storm of a disease. Rapper 50 Cent is the perfect storm of the rap world. Jayson Blair, the plagiarizing *New York Times* reporter, is "journalism's perfect storm." The war on terrorism is the perfect storm of the airline industry.

carolin.vesely@freepress.mb.ca



Weird word of the day

VERBIGERATOR:
(VER BIG ERATE OR):

One who senselessly repeats clichés.