

Art We Awesome: Queensborough Middle School Woodcarving Mural

With over 300 participants contributing to a 24 foot woodcarving, the Queensborough Middle School Woodcarving Mural is a great example of how art can be used to bring together a diverse community and foster community pride.

When the new Queensborough Middle School opened in 2003, it was envisioned as a community meeting place as well as a middle school.



The Queensborough Middle School Woodcarving Mural project was launched as a way for youth to take ownership of a project, learn about their neighbourhood's history, gain new skills of expression, and contribute something lasting to the community. As the project progressed, it also brought community involvement and a sense of history into the new school and fostered a renewed sense of community identity and pride.

Over 300 children, parents, teachers and community members contributed to the 24 foot woodcarving for the school, which depicts the history and flavour of living in Queensborough, a culturally diverse neighbourhood of about 3,500 people in New Westminster.



Both the design of the mural itself and the process of creating it reflected values important to Queensborough residents, such as diversity, inclusion and community pride. The process began with a community brainstorming session that included various members of the community including adults, business owners and youth.

From a list of words and concepts, Sukhdeep Rai, a teacher at the Queensborough Middle School, designed the mural:

"Members of our community were asked to share their thoughts on what Queensborough means to them. Then the challenge was to blend together various themes such as cultural diversity, physical environment and

economical heritage. **The most important theme was to capture the heart of the community - the people. They are what truly make Queensborough special.**"

Woodcarver Doug Morrison worked with everyone individually to create the mural, involving them at every stage of the project, from preparing the wood, to tracing the design, to carving the mural. And he taught them to use the special carving tools safely and effectively.



Participants learned new skills and had the chance to experience something new and different. New tools were bought for the school and the new techniques were integrated into the middle school's industrial education curriculum. Youth who never had carved before discovered a new hobby and many asked for woodworking tools for Christmas.

Although youth were the driving force in this project, flexible working hours made the project accessible to all neighbourhood residents. A diverse range of community members participated, including every Middle School student and teacher, school staff, family members, and other Queensborough residents—totaling over 300 participants in the end.

The mural took eight weeks of intensive work to complete and was unveiled at the Queenborough Middle School in January 2004. Benefits are apparent to both individuals who participated in the process, as well as to the community at large.

Benefits

Participants felt a sense of ownership of the project, and pride that they had contributed something to the community. It gave them a forum for meeting new people, a venue for individual expression and a chance for youth in the community to take on a leadership role. Justin, a middle school student, said:



"The program meant a lot to me because it gives me a chance to give back to the community something

valuable. I have done things in this community I am not proud of. **I am not an angel, but this is something I am proud of.**"

The mural also brought a sense of history to a new building and brought the broader community into the Middle School. It enabled a culturally diverse community to come together with pride and celebrate what makes living in Queensborough so special. The project was so successful that it was awarded a 2004 Program Excellence Award from the British Columbia Parks and Recreation Association.

As a spin-off of the success of this project, the community consequently applied for and received, funding for three additional woodcarved welcome signs at nearby facilities. These welcome signs will involve families from the community in their design and creation, and contribute to a heightened sense of physical identity for the Royal Park area in Queensborough.

The Queensborough Middle School Woodcarving Mural project was a collaboration between the City of New Westminster Parks and Recreation Department and a local residents' committee called the Special Programs Committee, which has worked with the City of New Westminster to organize events, festivals and community initiatives over the past 25 years.

This was a community-driven project with several groups involved in financial and administrative support of the project. The City of New Westminster played a key role in providing in-kind contributions, including staff support, project facilitation, advertising and clerical support. Most importantly, as Renee Chadwick, the manager of the Queensborough Community Centre, emphasized, is that the City "encourage staff to have a community development philosophy" to see everything that they do as part of broader social initiatives. The community involvement and diverse participation in the Queensborough Middle School Woodcarving Mural demonstrate that the arts are a valuable vehicle for facilitating community belonging, fellowship and pride.



The City should “encourage staff to have a community development philosophy in everything they do...there is a need to foster and cultivate community initiative.”

—Renee Chadwick, Manager, Queensborough Community Centre

Key benefits

- Brought community involvement into a new facility (the Queensborough Middle School)
- Youth took ownership of the project and learned about themselves, their community, and a new form of expression
- Stronger cultural relationships were built through the diversity of people who participated in the project
- Renewed sense of community pride, fellowship, and belonging for all residents
- Spin-off funding granted for three welcome signs at other facilities in the community which will give the entire area a sense of identity
- Awarded the Program Excellence Award from the British Columbia Parks and Recreation Association

For more information:

Renee Chadwick
Manager, Queensborough Community Centre
City of New Westminster
nwparksrec@city.new-westminster.bc.ca

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