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St. Joseph's community dedicates new mosaic mural

By Jessie Tuttle
Union staff writer

Students, staff and volunteers gathered at St. Joseph Catholic School Monday for the dedication of a one-of-a-kind mosaic mural.

Recognized were the people who contributed their time and talents to the Fort Atkinson mural, which includes themes centered on a strong image of Jesus as a Biblical storyteller.

Sally Koehler, local art teacher and chair of the St. Joseph School Art Enrichment Committee, said a variety of individuals contributed to working on the project, some of whom put in 12-, 13- and 14-hour days. There were various jobs for each person who helped, including placing the tiles, cleaning the surface and grouting it.

"It just was a really fantastic group effort of combining the parish, the school, teachers, staff and alumni," she said. "It's just been an amazing experience."

Joshua Winer, this year's artist-in-residence, led brainstorming sessions with students in October. Imaginative ideas for the mural's theme surfaced from these gatherings, with a few images surfacing again and again. The selection of the mosaic theme was chosen by the school's students, staff and parents.

"Working together steadily for a week, we have created a work of art that will shine on the wall of the school for many years," Winer said. "Each of us has been a special part of this mosaic, and like the many small pieces of tile that together form the overall picture, our individual efforts are united into a shared community experience of building a work of art that is filled with beauty and meaning."

Students created concept drawings and detailed sketches for Winer. Using elements from these materials, he created one cohesive drawing that served as the "blueprint" for the mosaic.



MOSAIC MURAL — A dedication ceremony was held Monday at St. Joseph Catholic School in Fort Atkinson for the completion and presentation of the school's one-of-a-kind mosaic mural made by students, staff and volunteers. Pictured above, from right to left, are Charles Winer, mural artist Joshua Winer and local art teacher and chair of the St. Joseph School Art Enrichment Committee Sally Koehler. Below, Father Jay Poster of St. Joseph Catholic Church blesses the mural. — Daily Union photos by Jessie Tuttle

"(Winer) directed the whole thing beautifully," Koehler said. "He knew what the next plan was and kept the kids working at age appropriate activities. He was fantastic to work with. I would do another project with him in a heartbeat."

Students first molded clay into fish and other sea creatures that appear throughout the piece. They also created some of the raw materials for the mosaic by glazing tiles and fragmenting them once fired.

Every student, from 4-year-old kindergartners through pupils in eighth grade, was given an opportunity to participate in hands-on time crafting the mosaic mural. Families, parish members and alumni also were invited to work on the mosaic during optional evening and weekend sessions.

School principal David Podmolik said there are a lot of aspects to the mural that are beneficial.

"I am very pleased that everything about it includes a part of our mission," he said. "The faith aspect is there, but it also has given kids who maybe aren't really key on art a chance to contribute what they are skilled in such as math, engineering or something else."

During the dedication ceremony Monday afternoon, Koehler made time to thank the individuals who contributed supplies, time, services or money. The major sponsors of the project were the Cavillo and Wermeling families in memory of Alan and Bailey Calvillo, Greg and Lou Stark Schwemmer and the Wisconsin Energy Foundation.

The crew that installed the mural on the wall in the entryway consisted of Andy Koehler, Mike Theriault, Pat Moran, Jim Miller, Dennis Bries, Zac Shockman, Brian Zanin, Bill Buchta, Edwin Bos, Mike Opperman and Joe Hess.

Donors also were recognized: the Jim and Marie Nelson Family in honor of the eighth-grade class of 2011; a family donation in memory of Victor Jackson and in honor of Leona Jackson; the Dave and Jill VanderMause family in memory of Gary VanderMause; Patricia Wahl in memory of Dr. Kenneth Wahl; Elizabeth Schubert in honor of her children, Mike, Karen and Matt; Tom and the late Sue Burgess in memory of Bob Fixmer; Robert and Mary Tully Holman in honor of Makenzie, Ethan and Seth Foerster; Brad and Michele Simonson in memory of John Trautt; Lorraine Tekeley in memory of Sue Burgess; the Andy and Sally Koehler family in memory of Sue Burgess; and Cliff and Sue Brown in honor of their family.

Organizers also showed their appreciation to the suppliers of goods and services: the Edwin and Joanna Bos family, Dennis and Patricia Bries, the Bill and Rhona Buchta family, the Guillermo and Jessie Cruz family, the John and Janine Fixmer family, Anne Grover, the Joe and Paula Hess family, the Troy and Carol Huppert family, Jones Dairy Farm, the Andy and Sally Koehler family, the Bill and Tammy Kontry family.

Also, the Jim and Marie Nelson family, the Pat and Bethann Moran family, the Mike and Kelly Opperman family, the Todd Tesch and Debbie Wermeling family, the Mike and April Theriault family, the Dave and Jill Vander Mause family, the Randy and Sue Veenhuis family, the Velveteen Rabbit Bookshop and Guest House, the Shane and Christine Worden family, and the Brian Zanin and Karla Manternach family.

With the help from various people of the school, parish and community, Koehler said, the mural turned out even better than she expected.

"I had really high expectations, but it totally surpassed my expectations," she said. "I had a hard time visualizing how all the different materials would come together, but it is just a beautiful and amazing collection."

Podmolik said he is excited to have the work of art in their entryway, because it will give the school a kind of identity it did not have before.

"I'm thrilled to death that this new building is going to finally look like it's a Catholic school, and it's going to help seal an identity," he said.

