



One of the completed murals on the side of Trish's Red Bird Cafe in Dayton on Tuesday. The mural was painted by Alexandria Monik. PHOTOS BY NIKOS FRAZIER / JOURNAL & COURIER

# Trish's Red Bird Cafe gets retrofitted

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Drivers coming off of I-65 will now see a little slice of Dayton history as they enter the town.

Trish's Red Bird Cafe will be home to the town's first mural. The locally-owned restaurant was selected by the Tippecanoe Arts Federation as a way to highlight some of the county's smaller towns, Executive Director Tertia Lee said.

Artist Alexandria Monik was commissioned through TAF's Tippecanoe County Public Art



Alexandria Monik works on one of four murals on the side of Trish's Red Bird Cafe in Dayton on Tuesday.

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## Cafe

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Team to create a little bit of nostalgia and showcase the buildings long-standing history in Dayton.

Monik's designs are 50s-inspired and chronicle the building's time as a firehouse, gas station and mechanic shop.

The cafe's co-owner Trish Brown said Monik was one of two artists who reached out to Brown and her husband, Mark, and asked what they wanted before she submitted her proposal. The collaboration was a no-brainer, Brown said.

"I grew up here and I wanted to throw it back," Brown said. "She knocked it out of the park."

Monik has one week left to finish the art installment although she said she's ahead of schedule. TAF will dedicate the mural on Thursday at 2 p.m.

The past week's sun and wind presented a little bit of a challenge, Monik said. She welcomed the shade on the West wall after the direct sunlight affected the shading on the character's faces and caused the paint to dry quickly and steam, she said.

More than anything though, it's the heights that she dreads, she said. She painted the largest mural over the course of three days while leaning over on the side of a ladder.

Eventually, Monik said she stopped being stubborn and the Browns helped her build scaffolding for her to comfortably sit and finish the mural.

Monik's usual style leans closer to animation and anime with the exception of real-life portraits she paints on commission. Using her digital art skills to her advantage, Monik created the four images on the computer first and then used her projector to outline them on the white walls at night.

She found inspiration looking at old advertisements to model the characters off of and combined elements from classic cars to create the mechanic scene —



Alexandria Monik works on one of four murals on the side of Trish's Red Bird Cafe in Dayton on April 17. NIKOS FRAZIER / JOURNAL & COURIER

although one customer informed her it bears a striking resemblance to a 1955 Buick.

Answering questions and hearing comments from passersby has been an unexpected treat, she said.

"They've been acting like I'm painting on their house," she said. "I've gotten a lot of thank-you's for it which is peculiar because it's not their building or their business, but they appreciate that it's happening. They definitely feel a part of it which is neat."

The East wall facing Harrison Street represents the cafe itself with a red bird fluttering around a stack of pancakes held by a redheaded waitress.

Many have noted the redhead resembles the artist, but Monik said she didn't intentionally paint herself (she's also not a natural redhead.)

Originally, Monik envisioned the red-

headed woman being a mascot that transcended all four eras of the building, but decided against it to honor the slogan "built on history and community."

"I wanted it to feel more like an entity of people," she said.

Since the cafe sits at the start of Dayton, Brown said she hopes the murals will attract traffic from the interstate.

A list at the register was recently collecting zip codes to further the restaurant's application for an interstate sign. In just a few months they collected more than 1,000 different zip codes, Brown said.

"It's exactly what we were looking for and it's bringing new people in," Brown said.

The Browns have been wanting a mural since they started thinking about opening a cafe in 2015, but didn't have the funds to set aside for the artwork,

Brown said.

The mural idea was always to pay homage to the history of the building and match the inside's retro feel and vintage photos donated from the town, Brown said. The cafe name itself is a callback to the Red Bird horse-drawn sleigh that would bring visitors from Lafayette to Dayton in the mid-1800s.

Now their vision has become a reality and right in time for their one-year anniversary on April 30.

"I am just so humbled and appreciative that they [TAF] did pick us," Brown said. "There's so many areas that they could have done so to choose us is just really awesome."

Tippecanoe's public art project, The Wabash Walls, was recently featured in a guide for rural prosperity through the arts authored by the National Governors Association.

Making art easily accessible throughout the county, regardless of socioeconomic class, is the most important way TAF can move the needle on community development, Lee said.

Public art is not just about making an area pretty, it's about making the people who live there feel included and making others feel welcome, she said.

"By incorporating the arts you can increase the safety [of an area]," Lee said. "It demonstrates the community invests in the arts, which relates to the ability to recruit and retain workforce."

Art is a core factor of what raises the quality of life in a neighborhood, Lee said, right alongside clean air, safe streets and quality education.

It has tangible economic benefits as well, she said. Vacant buildings around the Wabash Walls saw a raise in property values within four months of the project's completion, she said.

The project will continue this summer with 12 artists. Again, community members are welcome to come meet and paint with the artists from July 21 through August 3.

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