

# Colorful wall mural celebrates Lovell Federal Health Care Center's 10th anniversary

By SHERYL DEVORE

LAKE COUNTY NEWS-SUN |

OCT 14, 2020 AT 8:33 AM



Muralist Everett Reynolds, left, and Jairo Andrade, a veteran and patient at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, work on the 10th anniversary mural. (Lovell Health Care Center / HANDOUT)

Since the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center opened a decade ago, nurse and painter Michelle Franklin dreamed of turning what she

deemed gray, lifeless walls of the tramway into a colorful mural to brighten the disposition of those who saw it.

Now, as part of the celebration for the Lovell Center's 10th anniversary, her vision has been realized. A 40-foot-wide color mural was hand-painted on walls in the center's tramway by roughly 15 veterans, some of them patients and others who work there, along with other staff members.

The project was guided by two local artists, Everett Reynolds and David Motley, and supported financially by Brushwood Center in Riverwoods. Brushwood Center partners with the Lovell Center on various art therapy projects.

"I just think it's wonderful," Franklin said of the mural she helped paint.

"Every person who walks by says how wonderful it is, how it makes them feel so happy. It's a message of who we are — half Navy, half VA — how we are named after (Capt. James A.) Lovell, who was in the Navy and an astronaut, and about the care given to patients," she said.



A mural created by artists, therapists, nurses, veterans and others affiliated with the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, celebrates the 10th anniversary of the center. (Lovell Health Care Center / HANDOUT)

The mural begins on one end with a portrait of Lovell, the center's namesake, and a spaceship. It continues with paintings of an eagle and patients receiving care from staff.

Franklin said she worked as a nurse at the VA hospital in North Chicago since 2008. In October, 2010, the VA Medical Center and the Naval Health Clinic Great Lakes merged their resources and services to create the Lovell Center in North Chicago.

“It was the first joint effort in the nation between the VA (the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs) and the United States Navy to create a federal health care center,” Franklin said. “They opened up a big clinic where we are able to see more people, and with the Navy people working right alongside of us. They’re

all awesome hard workers. I love working here, and I love that we joined with the Navy. I like what they bring to us. I like all their traditions.”



A mural created by artists, therapists, nurses, veterans and others affiliated with the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, celebrates the 10th anniversary of the center. (Lovell Health Care Center / HANDOUT)

Franklin, who worked in the mental health department and provided art as therapy to patients, said she's long wanted a large mural to be painted in the tramway.

She said she's seen how art helps people forget their problems and takes them away to another place where they can get immersed in doing something positive.

Franklin, now the center’s safe patient handling coordinator, said she and staff member Leticia “Letty” Knight, a retired Navy nurse and also an artist, are planning to add more colorful wall art to the center, if given approval. Knight has been involved in several painting projects at FHCC over the years, including a project in which three 7-foot tall canvases were painted and hung in one part of the center.

“The one I painted was two soldiers kneeling down, comforting each other over the loss of one of their fellow soldiers,” Knight said. “It was comforting for me, and I’m hoping it comforts other veterans who have been in that situation. I’ve had plenty of friends who were deployed, and they came back and they lost friends.”



Army veteran Leticia “Letty” Knight, who works at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center in North Chicago, paints part of the new 10th anniversary mural. (Lovell Health Care Center / HANDOUT)

Painting can be healing, she said. That's why she was happy to participate in the 10th anniversary mural.

Reynolds, a former Waukegan resident, took ideas from Lovell Center staff and veterans to create the mural concept.

He gave the participants different sections to paint. Wearing masks and keeping their distance due to the coronavirus pandemic, they worked together to complete the scene.

Reynolds helped create a mural of Ray Bradbury and another for an elementary school in Waukegan, along with Motley, who is also public relations director for the city of Waukegan. Reynolds said working on the Lovell Center 10th anniversary mural has been one of his favorite projects. He knows from experience, he said, that art can be therapeutic. "For me, I was kind of lost and didn't know what I wanted to do exactly. Picking up a paint brush took me away from that. It was something I could control, versus everything else in my life that was chaotic at the time. I was able to use painting as therapy for my stress."

He eventually became a professional artist and is hired to do murals and other works in the Chicago area.

"Working with the veterans was amazing," Reynolds said. "It was a really good experience for me. We had a huge Zoom call with residents and veterans, and had them talk about what they'd like to see in a mural.

"After everybody was done with their section, I came back and did final touches," Reynolds said. "I also was painting while they were painting. We had genuine conversations. We talked about their interest in art, why they enjoy art." He said one veteran told him the project made him joyful because he was part of something bigger than himself.

Catherine Game, executive director of the Brushwood Center which supports the mural efforts, experienced that joy as well.

“It was such a powerful experience to be in the midst of this crisis (the pandemic), and to be creating something so beautiful and so positive in a space that’s not only serving veterans, but also serving those who care for them, the doctors, the nurses – the transportation team, all of those essential workers,” Game said.

The Brushwood Center and the Lovell Center will host a virtual reception showcasing the mural at 1:30 p.m. on Oct. 29. The program will feature veterans and artists who created the mural, and a guest appearance by Capt. James A. Lovell. For more information and to register, visit <https://www.brushwoodcenter.org/lfhccmural.html>.