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News

Mural takes visitors on journey through Sunnyvale's history

By **CODY KRAATZ** | Sunnyvale Sun, Los Gatos Weekly-Times, Saratoga News, Cupertino Courier, Bay

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They call it the “wow room.”

Sebastopol muralist Ali Pearson unfurled a 9-foot-by-60-foot journey through Sunnyvale's past on Aug. 8 that will surround visitors to the Sunnyvale Heritage Park Museum's main exhibit room.

It begins with the early Ohlone residents, then the arrival of the missions and the arrival of the Martin Murphy Jr. family in a covered wagon in 1844. Murphy is credited with forming the city of Sunnyvale.

The panoramic mural scans all horizons of Santa Clara Valley, as seen from Sunnyvale.

It's morning, and the sun rises from the southeast behind tule-choked marshes that transform over time to wheat fields, early industries and world-renowned orchards that are bulldozed for tract homes and the high-tech industry.

Moffett Field's historic Hangar 1 and the U.S.S. Macon airship. An 1880s locomotive rolling into the tiny hamlet of Sunnyvale, with buildings that still stand on Murphy Street today. A fruit stand beside snow-white rows of blossoming trees.

“I wanted to have the geography make sense, so that you’re standing in one place looking around at the hills of Santa Clara Valley,” says Pearson, who painted the mural on a long wall in her home studio and is pasting it up like wallpaper.

Look closely and you’ll see Mount Hamilton and Los Gatos gap, where Highway 17 heads into the Santa Cruz Mountains.

“You’re looking through time. You’re also changing your viewpoint from standing at ground level to being up in an airplane,” says Pearson. “It’s as if you’re rising up in the air.”

A prolific landscape muralist, Pearson recently installed three monumental mountain and forest scenes for a Sequoia Kings Canyon National Park visitor center, as well as many other scenes that transport the viewer anywhere from the time of dinosaurs to underwater in San Francisco Bay.

Pearson also painted a few scenes of the Murphys crossing the United States for the museum’s introduction room.

“My husband is also a Murphy descendant so we knew about . . . the museum a couple of years ago because of part of his family being active in the Murphy legacy.”

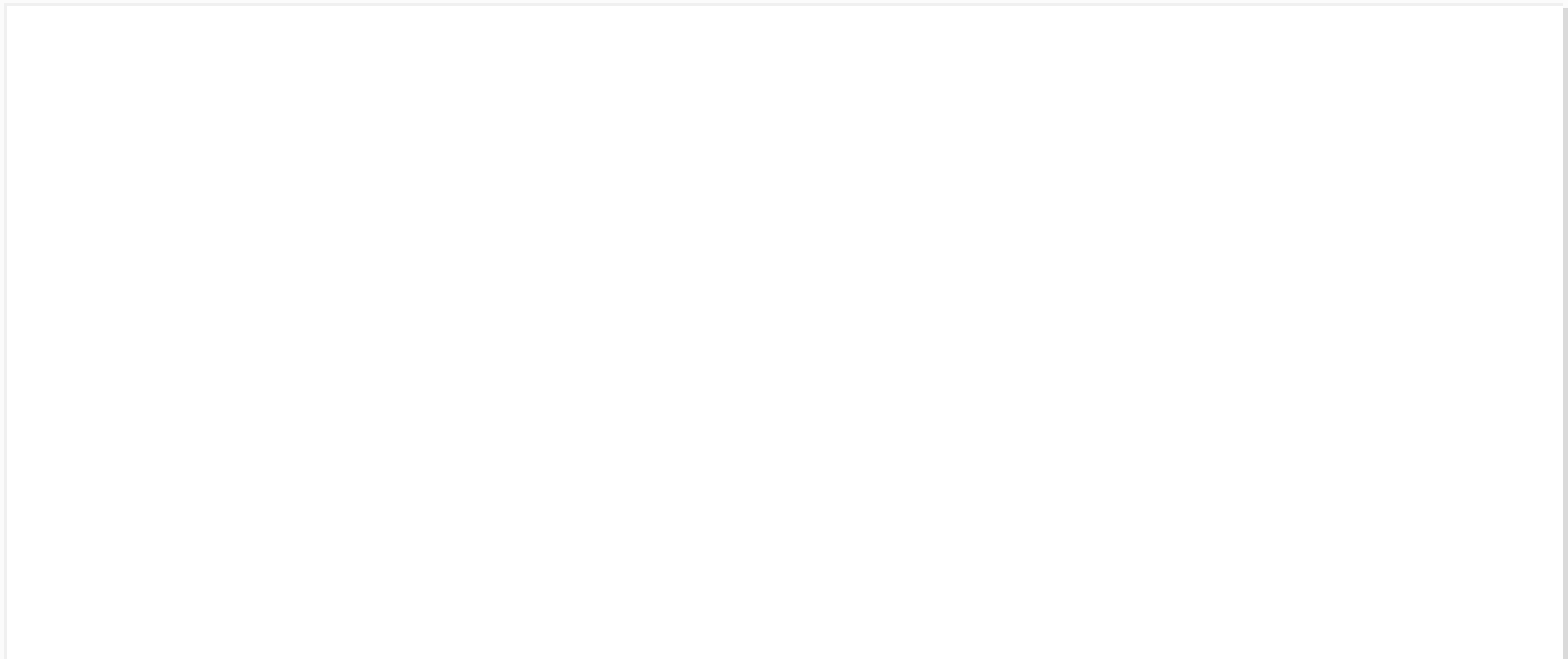
The mural, done with acrylic paint and a double clear coat, is built to last easily 100 years, she says, like the sturdy museum itself.

Laura Babcock, chair of the museum board, was bubbling with excitement as she gave a tour of the mostly-empty \$2.9 million museum, a six-year labor of love, as the mural was going up. She says the mural hits all the highlights of Sunnyvale’s history, even if some parts couldn’t be squeezed in.

“There were a lot of choices,” she says. “There are a lot of people that were very instrumental in the development of Sunnyvale that you can’t include in a mural of this size.”

But the rest of the 8,000-square-foot museum will complete the tale with period rooms, portraits, quirky artifacts and explanatory exhibits, says Babcock.

“We don’t want a lace and doily museum. We want something of interest to men as much as women, adults just as much as kids . . . (and) always changing.”



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