

Star blanket mural makes a big statement

BY EVA WASNEY
STAFF REPORTER

WEST END

Before the paint had a chance to dry, the star blanket mural wrapping The University of Winnipeg's Helen Betty Osborne building had already become a source of community pride in the West End.

This is the fifth star blanket mural Métis artist Kenneth Lavallee and Synonym Art Consultation have draped over a building in Winnipeg. In First Nations cultures the star blanket is given as a gift of honour and is intended to protect, empower and comfort those wearing it.

"I wanted to make a big statement; it's sort of a way of reclaiming physical space on Treaty 1 land," Lavallee said.

The mural at the U of W is particularly meaningful for Lavallee because it speaks to the inspiration behind the larger star blanket project. While they are beautiful pieces of public art, the murals are also intended to honour missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit peoples — an issue Lavallee started grappling with after learning more about the murder of Helen

Betty Osborne in 1971.

"I was completely blown away by how tragic that whole case is and that it's such an injustice... I had to do something," he said. "Five years later we're painting a star blanket on the Helen Betty Osborne building, which feels like it's all coming full circle."

Lavallee and artist Annie Beach worked on the mural at 511 Ellice Ave. from Aug. 13 to 20 with a team of paid staff and volunteers.

"It's really important for us to have the community be present as well, it feels like we're all kind of stitching this big star blanket together," Synonym co-founder Andrew Eastman said.

The Helen Betty Osborne building is home to the university's Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre, which has become a community gathering place.

"It's especially fitting that this beautiful artwork wrapping our building is being created in partnership with a group of talented artists and dedicated community members," said Jarita Greyeyes, U of W director of community learning and engagement.

West End resident Kenneth Castillo was excited about the new richly coloured, geometric addition to the neighbourhood.

"People are always saying the West End



Photo by Eva Wasney

Annie Beach, Andrew Eastman and Kenneth Lavallee in front of the star blanket mural at The University of Winnipeg.

is a dangerous neighbourhood," he said. "In reality, it's like any other neighbourhood and adding stuff like this maybe people will come by and experience the West End more."

Castillo and his friend Osani Balkaran referred to themselves as the "sous chefs" of the project because they were in charge of

prepping the walls with primer before the more intricate details got added.

"It makes you proud of your neighbourhood whenever you walk by it," Balkaran said. "It's a big thing to want to show someone your neighbourhood and where you come from."

** AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM WOJCIK'S FUNERAL CHAPELS **

On Wednesday, August 8, 2018, we lost our mentor, Richard Wojcik. He passed away suddenly at the Grace Hospital at the age of 49 years. Richard was a loving father, brother, son, uncle and friend to many. Needless to say, his passing has been devastating for his family and the staff of Wojcik's Funeral Chapels & Crematoriums.

We want to reassure the communities that we serve that Wojcik's Funeral Chapels & Crematoriums is indeed open for business and that you can count on us in your time of need. Your family will continue to be cared for by a licensed funeral director as we move forward without Richard.

The vision that Richard had when he established the business in 1998 has been instilled in all of us, and we will continue to maintain his high standards when serving your family. Richard developed many systems and policies over the years

that will assist us as we carry on his tradition of providing the highest quality of service possible. You will continue to be treated as family by our staff as we provide good old fashioned and personalized funeral services. Our goal will be to honour his memory by carrying on with his vision.

We have had a few inquiries regarding prearranged funeral contracts, specifically if these plans are "safe". We want to reassure everyone that has such a plan with Wojcik's Funeral Chapels & Crematoriums that these plans are indeed safe and will be honored in your time of need. If you have more questions, please feel free to call us at any time.

We would like to thank our family, friends and the community as a whole from the bottom of our hearts for the kindness, support and compassion we have been shown. The prayers

that so many have offered have meant so much to us. The many phone calls, emails, personal visits and floral arrangements are greatly appreciated. We are thankful that so many of our friends in funeral service have offered help.

We would also like to thank those that responded to Richard's emergency, and to the skilled and caring staff of the Grace Hospital ER and ICU. Words alone cannot express the gratitude we feel for the care you provided as you fought to save his life.

Thank you all for your continued support. It has been a source of strength for us as we move ahead.

Sincerely,
The Wojcik family and the staff
of Wojcik's Funeral Chapels &
Crematoriums

Our Family Serving Yours

From Two Winnipeg Funeral Chapels, two privately owned
Crematoriums and serving Richard's hometown of Beausejour, Manitoba

Wojcik's
ALL BELIEFS & FAITHS
Funeral Chapels & Crematoriums Inc.

"Where care & compassion come from understanding"

2157 Portage Avenue

Located 1 block west of Deer Lodge Centre
Winnipeg, Manitoba

204-897-4665

1020 Main Street

Located 4 blocks south of the Redwood Bridge
Winnipeg, Manitoba

204-586-8668

Serving Beausejour

**1-866-424-6271 or
204-268-2263**

www.wojckisfuneralchapel.com