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Rusty van becomes trusty work of art, thanks to the talents of a dozen teens

BY JANET KLOCKENGA • JKLOCKEN@DMREG.COM • MARCH 6, 2009

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Call it art on the go.

Twelve kids with the Logan Boys & Girls Club on the city's east side worked hard this winter to create moving art.

Their project took the form of a donated Ford Econoline van given to the club by Variety - The Children's Charity of Iowa.

Working under the direction of Des Moines artist Mark Scheuermann, the teens airbrushed local scenes all over the van, which will be used as a transportation vehicle for the children of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Iowa.



THE REGISTER

JANET KLOCKENGA/the REGISTER Members of the Logan Boys and Girls Club pose Friday by their Art Car, a van donated to the club by Variety — The Children's Charity of Iowa. From left are Danielle McGregory, 12, of Altoona; Doneice Johnson, 15, of Altoona; Integrity Narcisse, 12, of Des Moines' west side; Blake Meeks, 16, of Des Moines' east side; Ke'Auna Meeks, 13, of Des Moines' east side; Ar'Tiana Black-Scott, 17, of Des Moines' west side; Marvin Robinson, 18, of Des Moines' east side; and Wie Toang, 12, of Des Moines' east side.

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On Friday evening, the club had an open house to unveil its new Art Car, which holds 15 passengers.

The project was a partnership of the club and pARTners Unlimited, an arts program that works with at-risk youth.

Randolph Scott, team director at Logan, said the teens readily took on responsibilities.

"We became more like a family," he said. "These kids come from different backgrounds and different schools. They don't see each other except at sporting events or whatever. But they came together and worked together to accomplish a common goal. They learned to work as a team."

Elected shop manager by the other teens, 18-year-old Marvin Robinson of the east side quickly became familiar with a sander. He worked numerous hours for about three weeks to sand rust off the vehicle. The sander's disk was worn to about half its original size, Scheuermann said.

"It took a lot of man muscle - and mechanics," Robinson said. "It was nice painting it, too. I didn't know you could paint like that."

Scheuermann described the van when they received it as being "in really bad shape." He said the group had \$250 to rebuild, sand down and repaint it.

"There are a lot of budding artists in this group; there's some real talent there," said Scheuermann, a former mechanic who now works full-time as an artist. "These kids got to be exposed to something they never would have. If you can turn their light bulbs on, that's important."

The van depicts life in Des Moines, with a cityscape at dusk painted on one side.

The other side shows green meadows with the city in the distance, and is meant to be a view south toward Des Moines from Saylorville Lake.

The seats can be removed to install a 10-by-5-foot laminate wood basketball court complete with free-throw

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arcs the children painted on it.

Kelly Boon, founder and executive director of pARTners Unlimited, said this kind of project helps build confidence and teamwork.

"It's all about the group forming a team," she said. "They pull their ideas together, then the artist helps them. It's a 60-hour program that builds self-worth. They are feeling value about themselves, and bringing a project together so the community can see what they have done."

The organization began working in 2007 with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Iowa to create several Art Cars. Last year, those cars were featured in the 2008 Iowa State Fair Parade, then they were auctioned to raise money for charity.

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