

'Veterans for Peace' mural unites veterans, community at IUS

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NEW ALBANY — On a wall along an entrance to Indiana University Southeast hangs a community art piece, a reminder to cherish the freedom so many have fought for.

And at a ceremony Tuesday evening, “Veterans for Peace” — the two-panel mural depicting Americans in combat from World War II through the present — was dedicated to a crowd of service men and women, students, faculty, staff and community members.

Tony Fetz, an Army veteran who served in Vietnam, was among the community and student military who contributed to the piece. He said he hopes it can incite others to get involved.

“It felt good,” he said. “I would really encourage veterans to participate when they can in things like this.”

He also stressed the importance of it to honor those who have served and to keep their stories in the forefront of Americans' minds.

“I think it's important that people appreciate what these people went through,” he said. “The more people that know about it, the more people that will appreciate what happened and what people gave up for what we've got.”

He also got his brother, Maurice Fetz and his cousin, Lonnie Fetz, involved with the projects. They're both Marine Corps veterans.

Maurice served before Vietnam, but he said it is important to be proud of all who serve, no matter where or when.

“I think every family should be proud of their relatives being in the military, serving the country,” he said. “That's what we're all here for is freedom.”

“I know a lot of it has changed over the years — I know there were a lot of problems in the Vietnam era as far as people not agreeing with the government but I think we've come full circle now. I think most families are proud.”

The mural starts on the left with the American flag, showing Middle Eastern countries from more recent conflicts. As it moves toward the right, the colors gradually fade as it reaches World War II.

“It's meant to fade because as time goes by, you forget a lot,” Tony Fetz said. “And that happened a long time ago and which isn't as bright in your memory as this [end] is.”

Mariana Grohowski, associate professor of English at IU Southeast, and Susanna Crum, assistant professor of fine arts, in partnership with the Louisville Visual Arts Association, got the project off the ground, working with the students and community contributors.

“I love the idea of collaborating and making artwork,” Crum said. “That activity allows you to have different kinds of conversations than you would if you were just sitting around a table.”

“I think there are some really kind of transformative aspects of making artwork together if you're not an artist. What we're doing is presenting kind of an intergenerational continuity between countries and wars...”

The project — around \$3,500 — was funded in part by the Louisville Center for Neighborhoods and through a matching grant from the Jennifer Lawrence Arts Fund, a subsidiary of the Greater Louisville Fund for the Arts.

“To bring veterans and students together was a great match,” Fund for the Arts President and CEO Christen Boone said.

“We know that the arts have the power to heal, and also a powerful connection that builds community — when you bring people from different generations to create something together, you build connection and opportunity.”

Throughout the piece, photos of active and veteran service men and women represent the many who fought in a particular time and place, screen-printed over the paint. Some are community members, and some are IU Southeast students, like Desiree Magginnis, who attended the ceremony with her two young children.

The U.S. Army veteran served in military bases across the country for more than a decade; now she's working on a degree in communications.

She's involved in the student veterans organization.

“I think its exciting, it's amazing that the school wants to do something to honor the veterans and honor the service and to encourage service within our community,” she said.

To her, she said that the community can help by working to become more aware of what it means to serve — what military life is like, the struggles veterans face when fighting for freedom.

“Talk to veterans,” she said. “I've met a lot of people who tell their little kids 'Don't ask those questions; they don't want to talk about those things.' They have this idea that it's rude and that veterans don't want to talk about their experiences. And that's not necessarily always the case.”

IU Southeast Chancellor Ray Wallace spoke at the the dedication of his and the school's gratitude and support toward veterans.

“We are very honored to have this mural on our campus,” Wallace said. “This is a veterans-friendly campus and will always remain so — our goal is to make [their] transition from service member to student as seamless as possible.”

Among services offered to veterans, active service men and women and their families on campus include the Students Veterans' Organization, a veterans resource center in The Adult Student Center and other special events like the group of veterans who performed Shakespeare on campus to help explain and work through military struggles such as PTSD.