

MURAL, MURAL, ON THE WALL ...

Original piece helps Middleton High School maintain its roots

By Valeria Davis-Humphrey
Wisconsin State Journal

When Middleton High School's 100th graduating class — the class of 1979 — found out its alma mater was building a performing arts center not only for students but for the whole community, alumni came up with the perfect class gift: a mural for the lobby.

And the timing aligned with their hearts — 2004 also is the 25th anniversary of their graduation, said Jim Maher, mural chairperson and a professor at Mayo Clinic.

"We wanted to give something back to the school and create a lasting legacy for the class of 1979."

JIM MAHER
mural chairman

roots and the future of the school."

Middleton High School and the communities its students come from have a rich history, Maher said. The district's first one-room high school opened in 1879, he said, and has grown to serve more than 1,700 students in a state-of-the-art building covering a city block.

The members of the class of 1979 have distinguished themselves with creative leadership, Maher said, and the growth they experienced at Middleton High School played

a pivotal role in the people they've become.

Their gift is the 24-foot-long and 10-foot-tall original work by class member and professional artist Janet Ballweg. She's a professor at Bowling Green State University, where she specializes in print-making. Although this is Ballweg's first public mural, she had plenty of local experience from which to draw. She attributes her early exploration of her talent and first art commissions to her years at Middleton High.

"I took three years of art at MHS in drawing, painting and ceramics, and worked on artwork on my own outside of classes," Ballweg said. "While in high school, I also

participated in local art fairs and completed numerous commissioned drawings for MHS teachers."

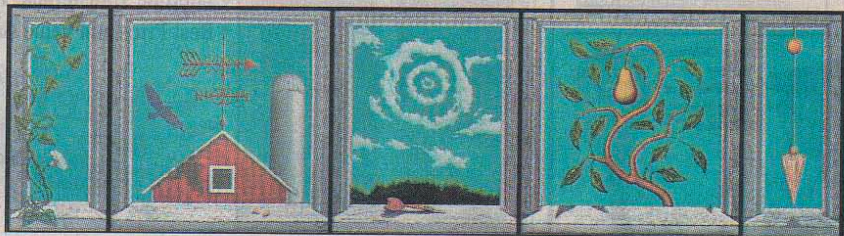
"It was those teachers who encouraged me to continue my art studies at the university," Ballweg said. "And I was truly fortunate that UW-Madison was just down the road, because as a first-generation college student, I really had no idea about art or college."

The mural for Middleton's Performing Art Center has five panels resembling windows, titled "Maintaining Roots," "Seeking Direction," "Taking Aim," "Cultivating Passion," and "Finding Balance." The work explores the hearts and souls of the class of 1979 and

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Ballweg



Mural

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all Middleton students, she said. "There are multiple layers of meaning within each image," Ballweg said.

There are the roots of life, community and home, Ballweg said, and flourishing ivy, images of rural Wisconsin and a crow seeking its destiny. A dart is aimed at goals, but those goals can be shifted by changing clouds. Passion and balance are all guided by a pendulum of unstoppable time.

"Ultimately, I wanted students to look and think, and come back to the work multiple times, seeing something a little different each time," she said. The mural will be dedicated

at an open house at the Performing Arts Center, 2100 Bristol St., at 5 p.m. Aug. 6.

Middleton High School Principal Tom Vandervest said the school is excited about the mural.

"It's been a tough few years with talks about building two high schools," Vandervest said. "The mural will remind us of our roots and our shared history with many thousands of alumni."

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