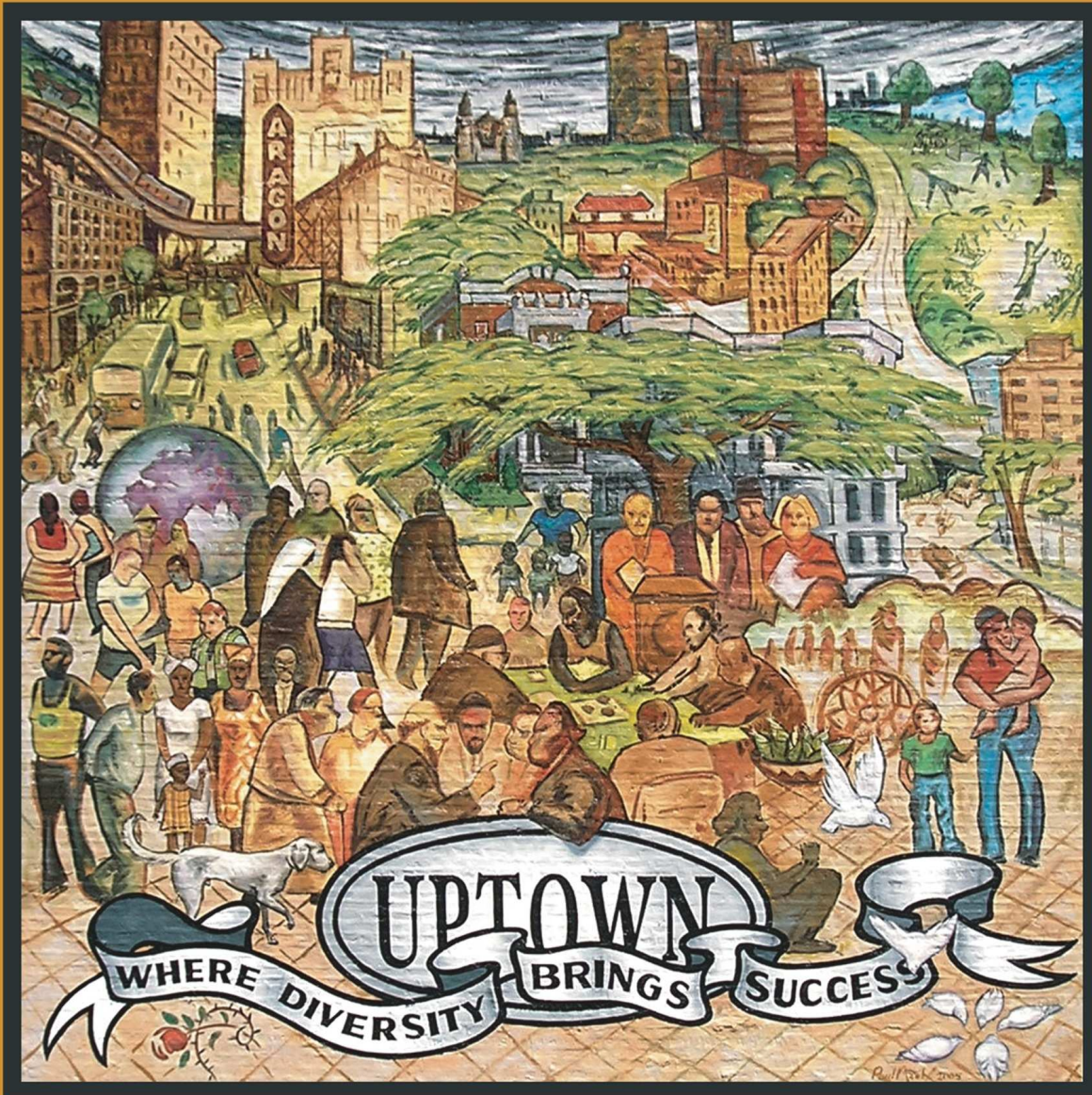


Uptown Neighborhood Mural



The Institute of Cultural Affairs

Community Resource Center
4750 North Sheridan Road, Chicago, Illinois

Paul Noah, Artist in Residence

Summer 2005



Uptown Neighborhood Mural

a project of the

Institute of Cultural Affairs

4750 North Sheridan Road

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Paul Noah

Artist in Residence

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UPTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD MURAL

Paul Noah

The Millennium Connection 2000 Conference of the Institute Of Cultural Affairs, held in Denver, Colorado produced seven streams of continuing global human development work. One of the streams was Community Arts. Uptown Chicago was one of 24 human development projects initiated by ICA around the world. Following that conference I was asked to be artist in residence at the ICA Community Resource Center in the Uptown HDP in Chicago, initially to paint murals and to work on artistic projects at the corner of Sheridan Road and Lawrence. I was also available for signage and decor work for the People's Church of Uptown.

Painted in 2005 The Uptown Neighborhood Mural is located across Sheridan from the ICA GreenRise building facing south to the ICA parking lot and by this year has deteriorated from years of southern exposure.

ICA colleagues Nan and Bill Grow were developers of dramatic stage musicals and other community mural projects . They created a story telling process and trained volunteer interviewers to collect the stories from selected residents of Uptown from which the mural was imagined.

Courting permission to paint the mural and claiming its location was eventful for the Chicago Uptown Neighborhood...

...and as Nan Grow writes... "The Story Must be told!"



THE STORY MUST BE TOLD

Report by Nan Grow

In Chicago's Uptown, The Institute of Cultural Affairs' *Corridors of Vision* demonstration, launched a story-based mural project in May 2005. Conceived as a gateway art form that "silently" greets residents and visitors, it is challenged to faithfully symbolize the memories of people who have experienced real life tensions of joy and sorrow, security and fear, hope and despair in this neighborhood.

As facilitators of the story gathering training session at our Chicago program center in Uptown, Bill and I brought our own memories of 13 years living there: sirens every night at our corner of Lawrence and Sheridan, suspicious characters lurking on the streets, cold strangers seeking our lobby to spend the night, the beautiful lake front park nearby.



Nan Grow

We conducted on-the-job training of a diverse group of nine participants who interviewed one another and 17 other residents of Uptown representing four ethnic groups of all ages and many backgrounds. Their experiences were varied and largely positive.

One interviewee told of arriving here rather forlorn and going for solace to look at Lake Michigan. On the way was a field where young men were playing softball. He had played many times in many places, so he stopped to watch. Then one of the players shouted an invitation to him to play, which he did. The prospects for his life changed that day as Uptown magically became his home.

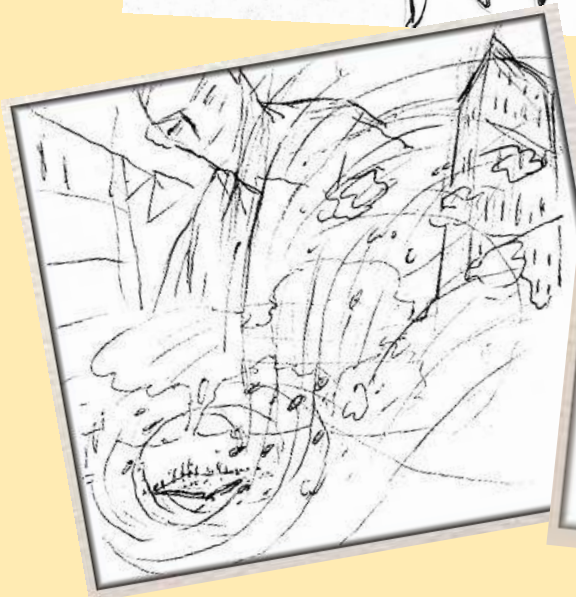
A young woman who had lived in a ghetto on the south side of Chicago was moved to a job in Uptown. She was so full of fears she stayed in her apartment as much as possible. One day she had to go out to buy a gift for a friend. It was a fine day, and she felt safe. The crossing guard waiting for school children spoke to her. The bank manager who had opened her account waved to her. Her attitude changed completely.



A young man told of belonging to a group of boys learning to tumble at Margate Park. It was fun, and when they were pretty good, their teacher took them all across Chicago to demonstrate tumbling in old folks homes and nursing homes. He got to know Chicago, but it was Uptown that opened the doors.

For some, uptown is a matter of symbols or emotions, not stories. It is about doves and pigeons. It is about ambulances and soccer games. It is about “sun on your back that feels like an angel’s touch.” It is about feeling strange and seeing a familiar face. It is about a bitter wind off Lake Michigan and the comfort of a café. It is the symbols we will gather from the stories people tell. It is the faces and activities of many races that remind us all how rich we are, even in sorrow and loneliness.

Last month the task began. Paul Noah, a master artist and an old colleague, will weave the stories into a mural. The gift of Uptown as a place of many nationalities living in unity is a **“story that must be told.”**



FINDING THE SONG FOR THE UPTOWN MURAL

Report by Bill Grow

Can a mural really sing? That's the way master artist Paul Noah characterized our quest for stories in Uptown to serve as the basis for the Uptown Gateway Mural he is commissioned to create. In mid-May, nine residents of the Keystone Community and Uptown gathered in Mathews Hall at the Institute Of Cultural Affairs for a story gathering training workshop led by Nancy and Bill Grow. The participants practiced by eliciting each others' experiences of Uptown, then they interviewed 17 other residents of the community representing four ethnic groups of diverse age and economic background. Stories were told of how newcomer's fear of Uptown was transformed into a sense of safety and forlornness changed to a feeling of being at home. One told how Uptown opened doors for him in his youth. Another expressed why she felt no discrimination in Uptown. For some, transformation occurred toward the end of the interviews, when people were asked, "Why was it important for you to tell this story?"

Following the workshop, participants got engaged right away by doing further interviews in Uptown and looking for other ideas to incorporate in the mural. Rebecca Straus, from the Keystone Community, found a book in a Chicago library entitled, A Guide to Chicago's Murals. She shared it with the workshop organizer, Mamie Tucker, who perused it for phrases, images and ideas. In the meantime, Paul extracted images, emotions and themes from the interviews and started representing them in symbols and sketches on colored paper on the east wall of the Community Plaza Hallway near the Lumumba Room. Swirls of colors from Marc Chagall murals adorn the sketches. On the opposite wall, Mamie posted phrases, such as "family, community groups and neighbors" and "rose with surrounding thorns", which are juxtaposed in harmony with Paul's sketches.



A model for the Mural is being organically grown on the wall like a musical composition for 4750 residents and Uptown visitors to add their "notes". When the final rendition is completed on a public wall it should answer our opening question and truly give voice to Uptown's song.

HOW WE DID IT

Report by Paul Noah

Participation has been key to this project. Nine people met with Bill and Nan Grow at the ICA Program Center in Uptown Chicago May 18 to train in the interview process for gathering stories from Uptown residents to be used as content for a neighborhood mural. After a presentation and demonstration, teams of two conducted 18 interviews at pre-scheduled appointments.

This process is adapted from story gathering methods used to create the dramatic productions *Swamp Gravy* in Colquit, GA and *Scrap Metal Soul* in Uptown Chicago. The challenge was to interview a broad spectrum of individual experiences, discern common themes of community identity and develop images which express the vitality of existence in Uptown.

Our plan was to gather 100 stories in 3 weeks, then compose the mural in the next 3 weeks arriving at hard copy artwork which then could be rendered as location, permission, materials, equipment, and personnel converge for the execution event.

Over 30 stories were collected and many additional conversations held with a broad spectrum of Uptown residents. These included social work professionals, immigrant aid advocates, community health workers, management professionals, political leaders, and a diverse group of residents in our ICA Program Center and in the Uptown community, including the “new generation”.



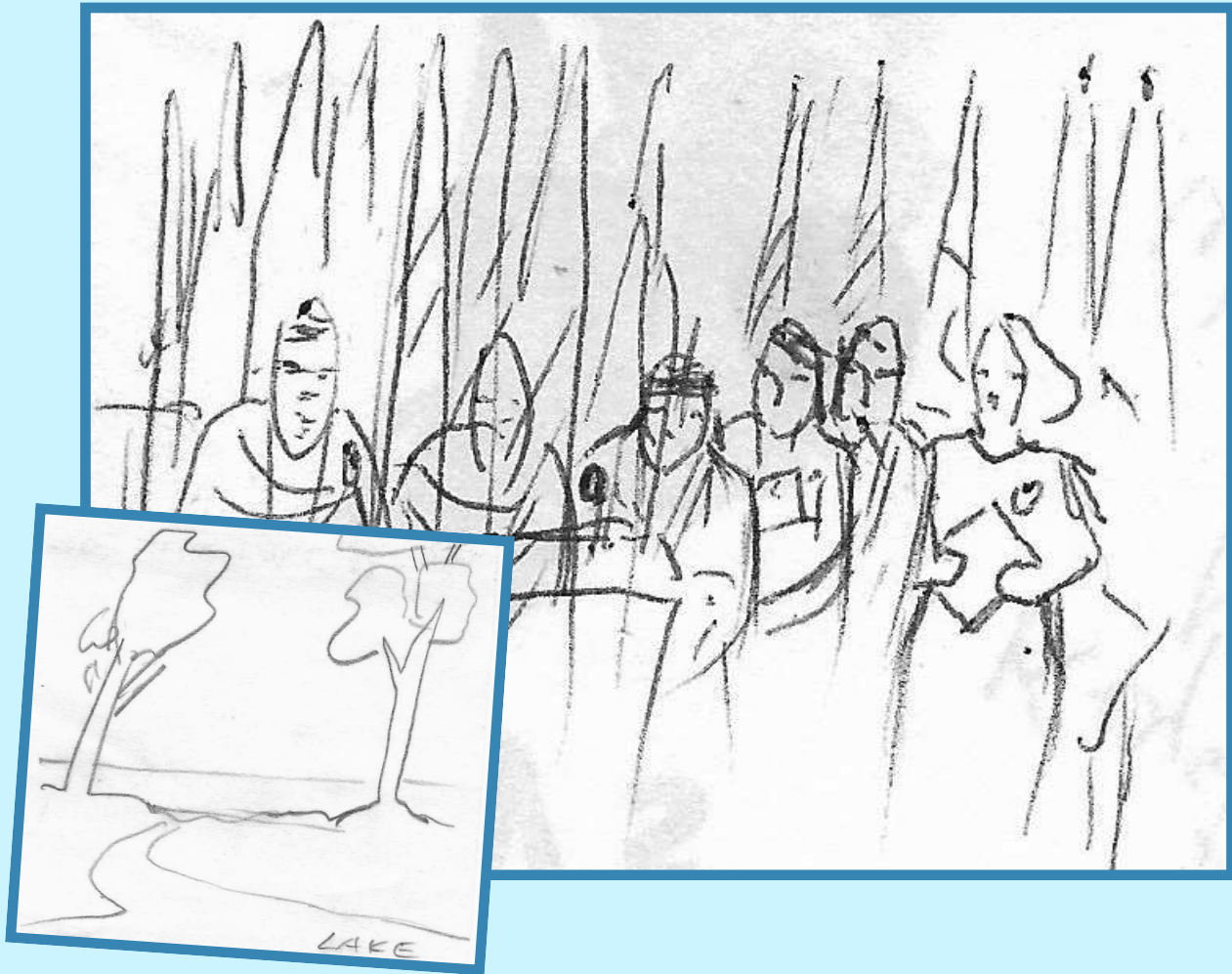


Paul Noah and Mamie Tucker used their office at our ICA program center as a dialog space filled with sketches, images, ideas and color patterns for visitors to respond to with their suggestions. Paul and his Chicago artist colleague, John Terdich, set up informal sketching sessions on the corner of Broadway and Wilson each Friday to attract the input of a wider clientele.

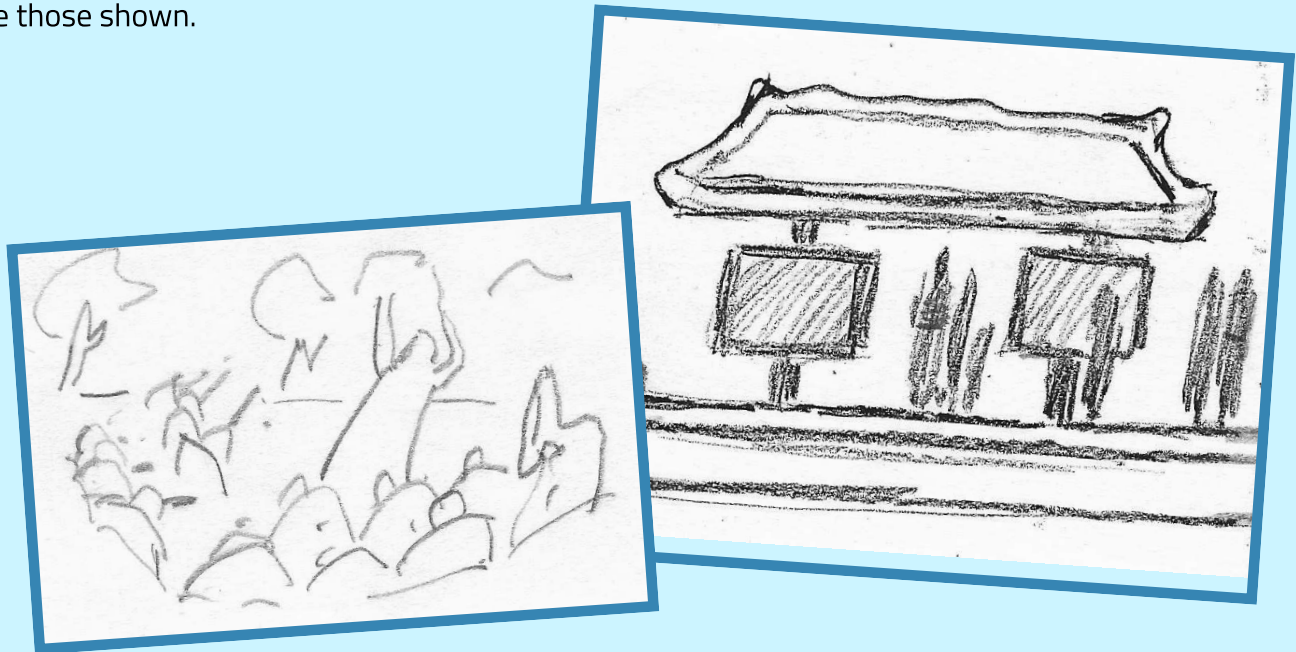




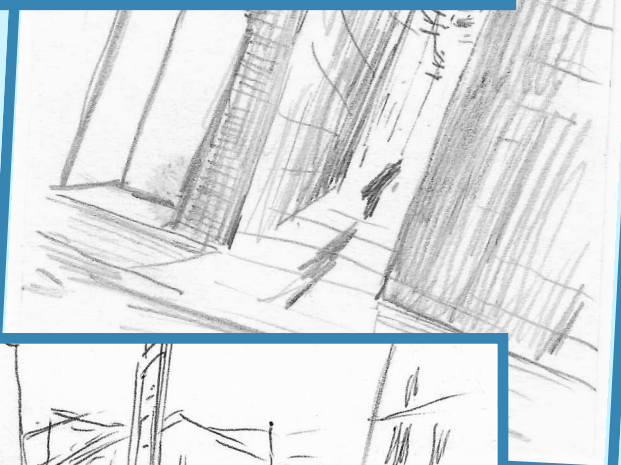




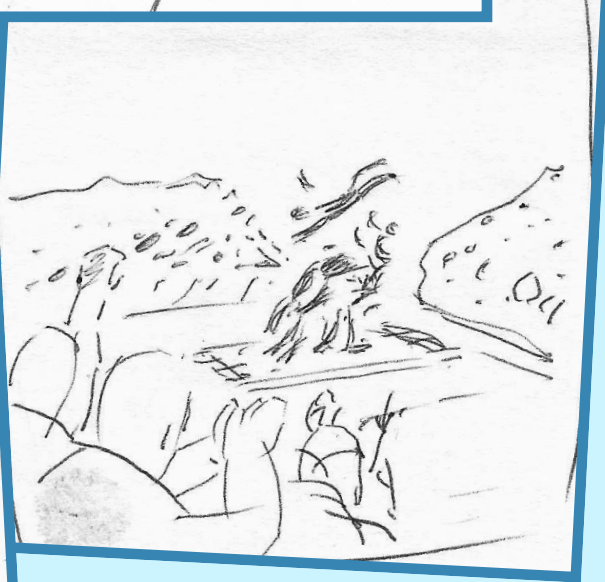
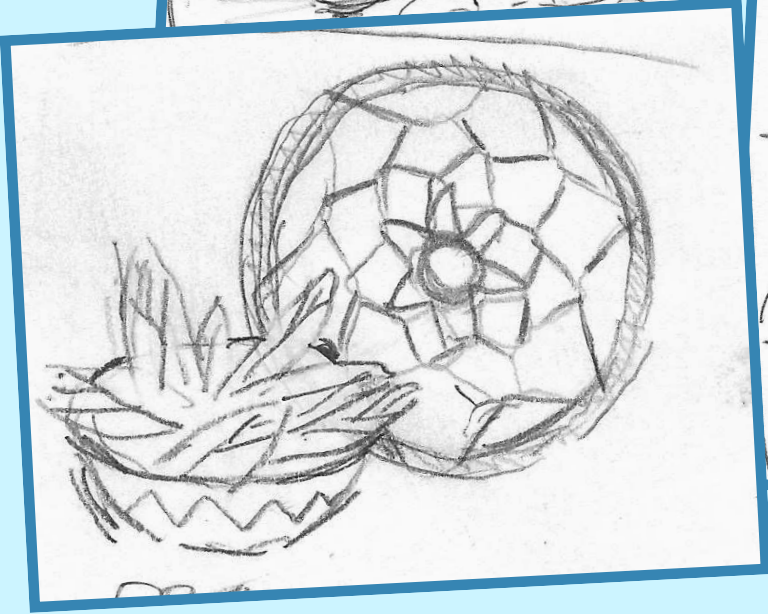
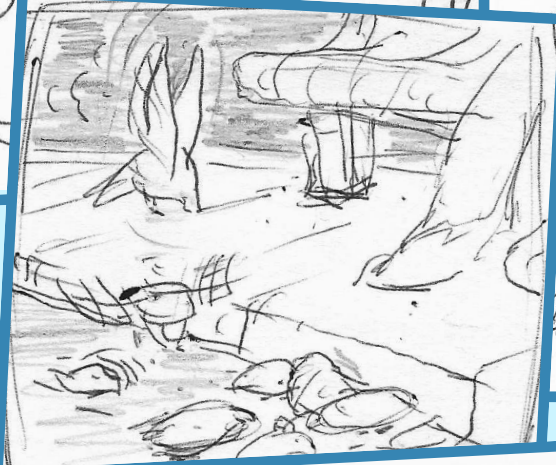
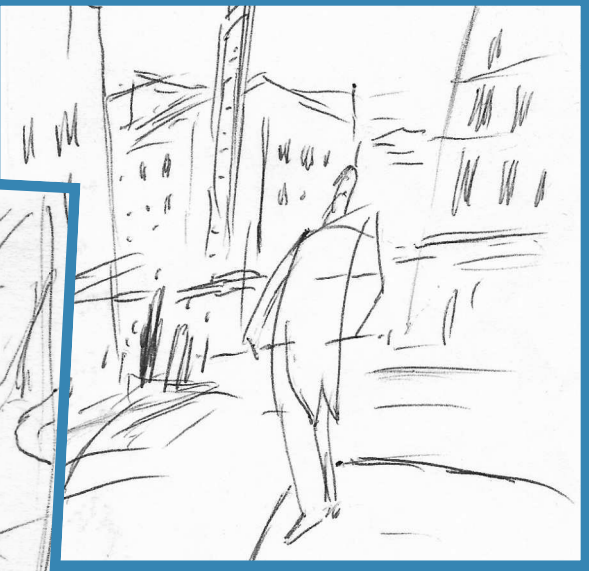
Another key to the project was the process of “conjuring a sense of the true and beautiful” through an iteration between people’s stories and artistic sensitivity. This process began by capturing the experiences, aspirations and verbal images from the stories (the “true”) into visual pictures (the “beautiful”) that made up a preliminary array of more than 60 sketches like those shown.

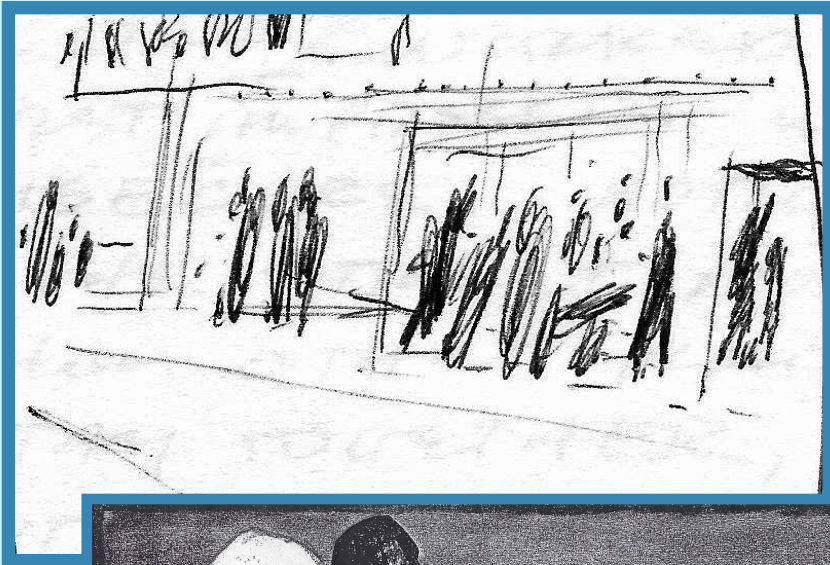


From the STORIES of UPTOWN



STORIES of



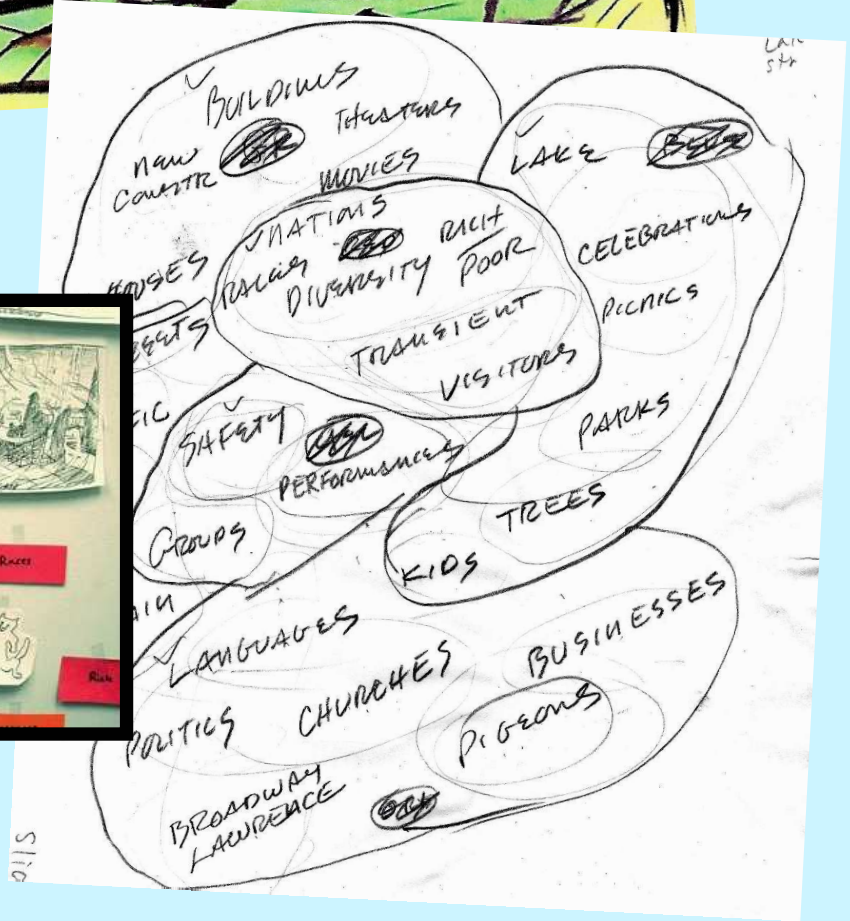




Next, the composing stage began by making composites of the sketches. Groups of sketches were montaged, copied and colored. From these groupings, general themes emerged that guided the mural design. Examples included safety, buildings, pigeons, nations, "EL" Train, diversity, lake, trees, streets, kids, rich/poor, etc.



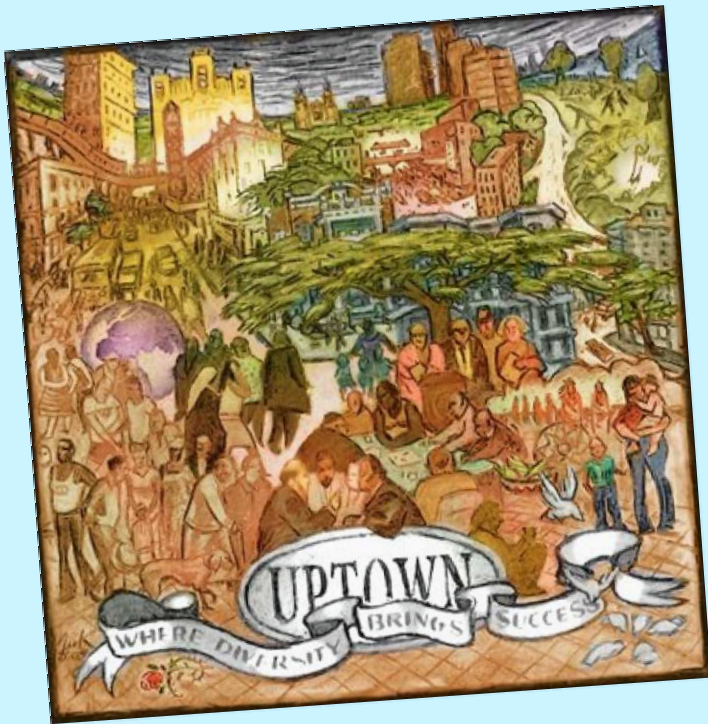




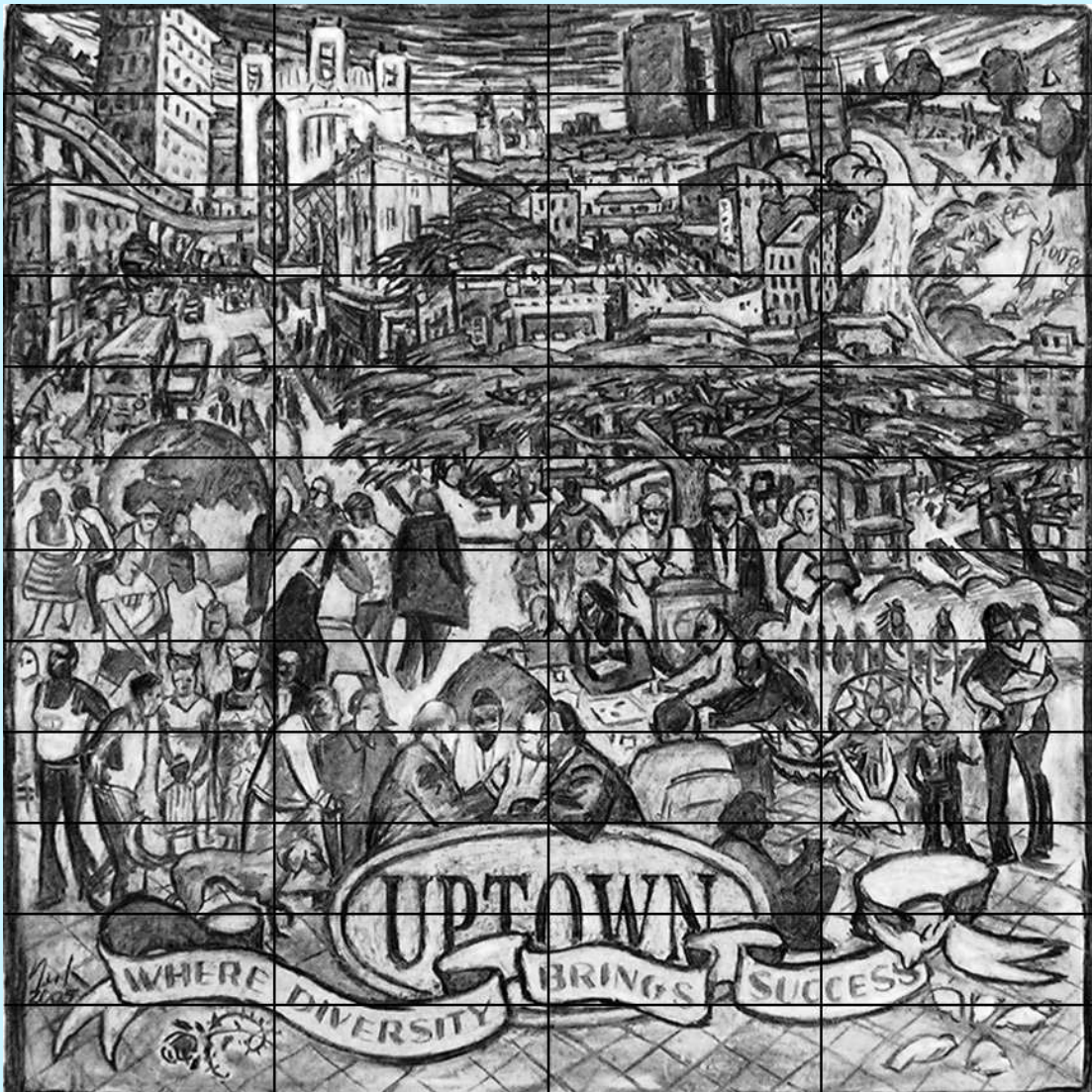
Then, a final composition was worked out in charcoal because of its flexibility for modification. During this stage, Paul faces his greatest artistic challenge in the process. To guard the integrity of the artwork, he knows he cannot “litter” the mural with every image captured in his preliminary sketches. Nor should he select content based on the imposition of some idealistic framework or mythological stereotypes of his own. He employs his poetic imagination to “conjure” a picture that tells the story that all the input holds in common.

This picture was composed into a twenty-four inch square charcoal drawing which was “loose” for seven weeks as people living and working in the ICA Program Center and the Uptown Neighborhood expressed their opinions about the composition.





The drawing was then fixed, scanned, and colored in photoshop. A final version was shown to the Uptown Homeowners Association and the Uptown Chamber. The drawing was gridded and projected to its actual size onto 2 ft wide paper and perforated. These patterns were ready to be rolled out in place on the wall and "pounced" with charcoal dust. The transferred image would then be penciled and painted following the colorized version. Some content would still be adjusted and changed as the painting proceeded.



FINALIZING PERMISSION

Bill Grow and Paul Noah

On Tuesday evening, July 12th, the Chicago Uptown Commission endorsed the ICA's proposal for fostering community identity by painting a mural on a building wall adjoining the ICA's parking lot on North Sheridan Road near its intersection with Lawrence Avenue. The action-packed drama leading up to this permission by the assembly of neighborhood block club presidents rivals the "Keystone Cops" silent films made on the streets of Uptown by the American film industry early in the 20th century.

Take a look at this abbreviated script provided by our muralist, Paul Noah:

Saturday, July 9 We had been reveling in the results of seven intensive weeks of designing our Uptown mural. We were just waiting for final permission to start on "our" wall across the street at its wonderful location which will greet travelers coming north on Sheridan Road. Suddenly, painters showed up and started painting on "our" wall!

We rushed out. "Stop! Wait!"

The interloper was a muralist from "Alternatives" youth programs next door to the ICA.

He responded: "We've been working on this for months. We have sketches, people lined up to paint, a signed agreement with the wall owner."

(Paul) "We have plans for this wall, too!"

After some embarrassing discussions, we agreed he would not paint any pictures until we talked this out and agreed to meet on Tuesday morning.

We had meetings planned to get neighborhood approval, which was the condition stated by the wall owner for giving us permission for a mural on his building. Now, our mural was in jeopardy. I had heard someone had planned a mural on that wall, but that was six months before, and the painters hadn't shown up. I had to take responsibility for this dilemma, nevertheless we couldn't afford to let the Alternative's mural happen.

Monday morning, July 11 We met with the director of Alternatives, who had been among the many residents we interviewed for stories on which our mural was based. We explained our participatory process, a good design and claim to the parking lot area. Their muralist did not have permission from the owner of the parking lot and had not gotten the neighborhood's permission either. But he had a signed document, and we still needed to stay friends.

Monday, 3:00 pm We met with the mural project director for the 46th Ward. We got their endorsement. Meanwhile, a telephone call to the wall owner got no response.

Tuesday, 10:00 am We met with the muralist from Alternatives and his supervisor. We presented them with our thirty years of history, community input, good design and a lesson on the need for neighborhood support of mural projects. His document turned out to have been signed by the corner store business owner, not the building owner or manager. He conceded.

Tuesday, 12:00 Noon We met with 48th Ward Alderwoman Shiller. We were well received and got her support.

Tuesday, 7:00 pm The Chicago Uptown Commission received our presentation with applause and offered a letter of endorsement to present to the wall owner.

Wednesday, 9:00 am We met with the building manager and got a signed permission document. Victory!

Wednesday, 11:00 We presented our mural proposal to the Uptown Chamber of Commerce, just for frosting on the cake.

Thursday, The scissor lift (platform for painters) and paint were ordered. Some adjustments were still being made to the final mural design, and wall priming began on August 1st, 2005.

Epilogue: The Alternatives muralist still needs a wall to paint on. He has people flying in from Washington, D.C. next week expecting to paint with him. We're meeting with him on Monday. If he hasn't found a wall by then, we will offer him a spot on our building in the alley, under aesthetic conditions. We will be working with him in the future.



PAINTING THE MURAL

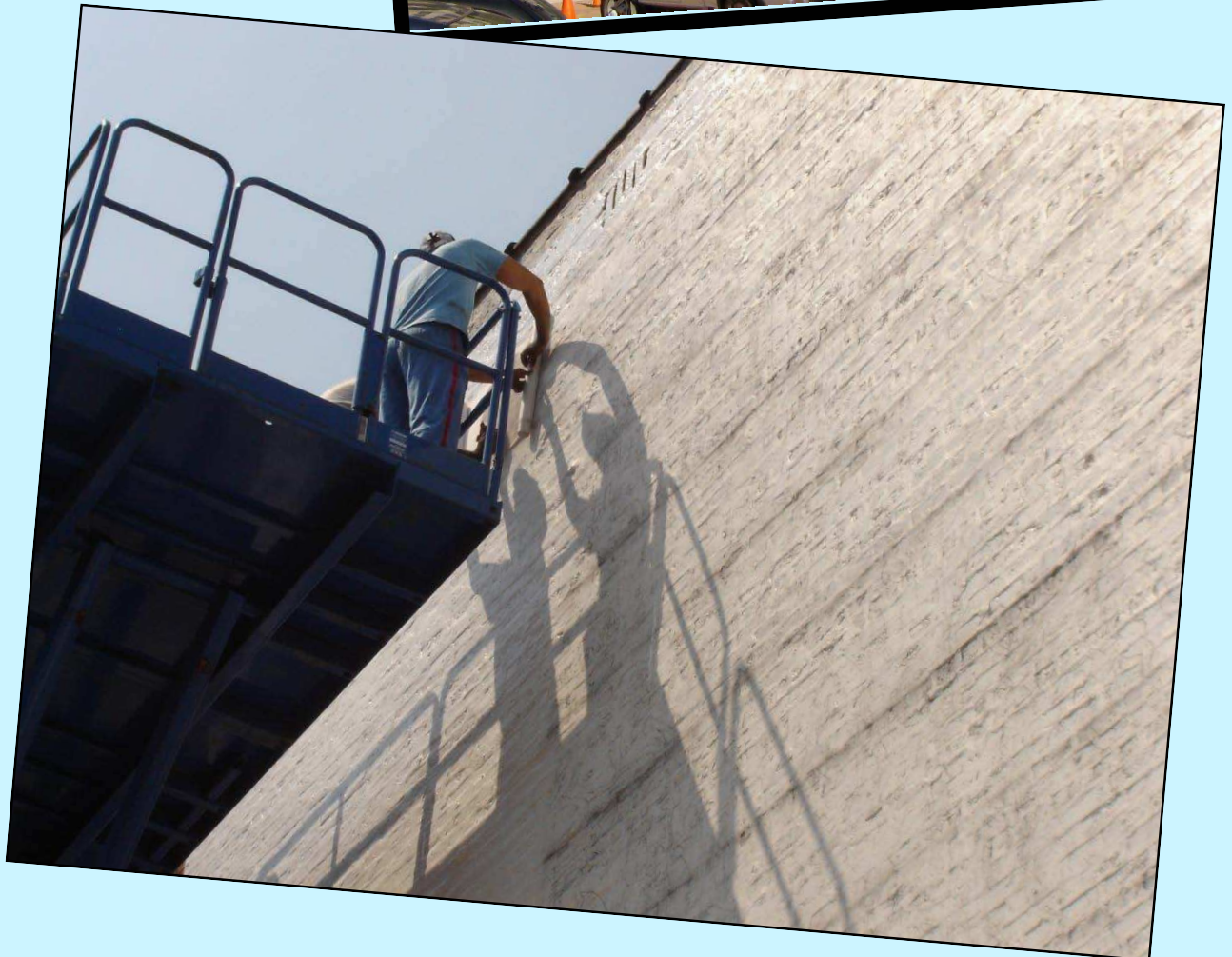
Mike, a visitor to the ICA building for the weekend helps Paul with the wall prep.



Paul Noah and John Terdich mix colors.

35 feet up to the top!

The perforated patterns are rolled out in place onto the wall and pounced with charcoal dust.





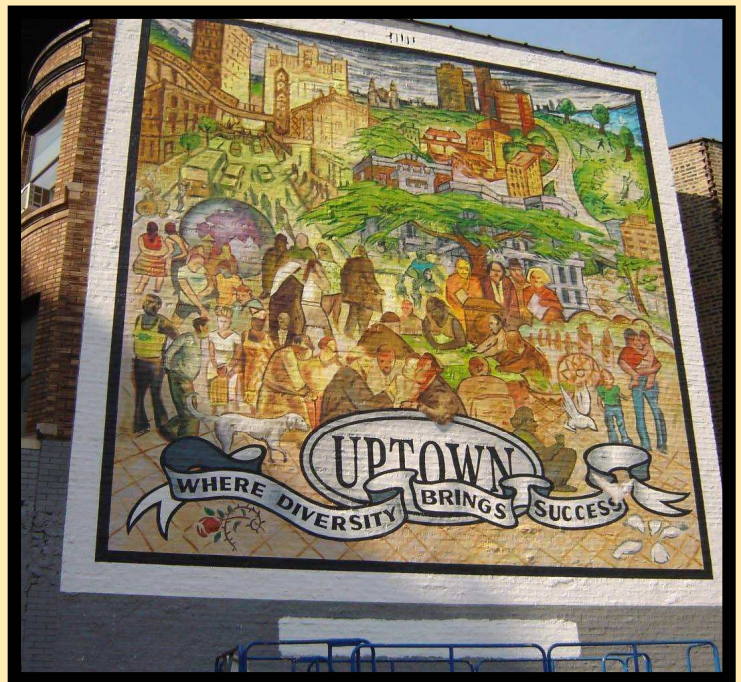


UPTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD MURAL

A Project of the Institute of Cultural Affairs
Summer 2005 - Report by Bill Grow

Something is new on Chicago's skyline. Not a mega structure to compete with the Sears Tower, nor a sculpture to rival Picasso's steel statue in the Loop, but an equally significant 25 feet square mural in Uptown. It's not a typical mural making a political statement with graffiti or expressing an artist's idea of a community, but an art form whose colors sing the stories of the people of an extraordinary place. On a journey north from the Loop on North Sheridan Road you will be greeted by this mural just before the intersection with Lawrence Avenue. It will let you know that you are entering a very special place in America: "Uptown, Where Diversity Brings Success".

The primary key to success of the Uptown mural is the participation generated through gathering residents' own experiences of life in Uptown. In May 2005, the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) conducted on-the-job training of a diverse team of story gatherers, which led to the collection of over 30 stories and many additional conversations with a broad spectrum of Uptown residents. These included social work professionals, immigrant aid advocates, community health workers, management professionals, political leaders, and a diverse group of residents in the ICA Center and living in Uptown, including the "new generation".



The project leaders, artist Paul Noah and ICA staff member Mamie Tucker, began the artistic dialog with the stories from the very first interviews. They set up a first floor office in the ICA Center as a studio and dialog space filled with sketches, images, ideas and color patterns for visitors to respond to with their suggestions. Next, the composing stage began by making composites of the sketches. Groups of sketches were montaged, copied and colored. From these groupings, general themes emerged that guided the mural design. Then, a final study of the mural was worked out in charcoal because of its flexibility for modification. A photoshop colorization of the charcoal study provided the final model from which the mural was painted. Because of the highly participatory process, the mural design was "a work in progress", and the charcoal model continued to be modified even as the first paint was applied to the wall.

Now as we stand directly in front of the mural, we can enjoy a virtual visit to the completed project. It only remains for us to reflect on it from the perspective of our own experience.

1. What images, shapes or colors in this mural strike you?
2. What emotions do they evoke in you?
3. What do they remind you of from your own experience?
4. In your opinion, what story is the mural telling you about this community?
5. In your opinion, what is the meaning of this mural for you personally?
6. What “souvenir” will you take with you from this mural to share with your own community?



Bill Grow leads a reflective conversation about the Mural

This Uptown Neighborhood Mural is part of a larger Uptown *Corridors of Vision* (COV) initiative that was inspired by the work of Phil Nyden, a noted urban researcher at Loyola University, who stated in 1997 that the diversity, problems and opportunities of Uptown, Chicago and Newark, New Jersey make them the foretellers of communities across America. COV is a community visioning and planning process begun by the Uptown Community Development Corporation in cooperation with the ICA, the Heartland Alliance and the Uptown Chamber of Commerce. This partnership recognizes community arts as a key to unification and sense of ownership of local residents living in the tension between gentrification and affordable housing. This new, unique mural is paving the way for additional art forms along the corridors of Uptown.



COMMENTS DURING THE PAINTING

Collected from observers by Mamie Tucker

To someone walking by: What do you notice? --"Different people, Uptown, homeless, strugglin' and not so strugglin', I see God in all this. Beautiful."

Paul was cleaning up the wall below the mural cutting in the bottom edge with a brush. An old man with his catheter bag hanging in front: "Don't bother with that brush. Grab that roller and cut in that bottom line!"

A homeless woman (Mary) who at one time owned a graphic arts business, lost her work in the early nineties digital revolution, now homeless, came to watch every day.

A man was paused along the fence on the sidewalk, his hands joined behind his back in typical style like many others I've seen in other neighborhoods and like the one from a photo I took on Argyle street that I drew from for a figure in the mural. He watched for an unusually long time then left. Later he returned to the same spot, wrote or sketched in a notebook and left.

To a man sitting on a basket in front of building watching Paul paint: "Interesting?".... "How does he do that? I bet he uses a spray can."

To a young man longingly looking at the mural: "What do you think about this?".... "Amazing. You know I am a student at the Chicago art institute. I want to help next time."

To a lady staring at the mural: "Interesting?".... "Yes. You Know I am a painter also. I use nail polish to paint small pictures and then sell them. Amazing what pictures do!"

To another: "What do you notice?"... "Uplifting and beautiful. It shows unity and togetherness, one nation of human beings in harmony."

A lady hollered up to me... "This is so uplifting. I love to walk by here." The next day I was on the ground when she walked by and had her fill out a questionnaire. She liked having her apartment building depicted in the mural.





THE SLOGAN ITSELF HAS AN IMPACT

"Uptown Where Diversity Brings Success" was actually articulated by Ken Rose, an ICA colleague from Upstate New York. While visiting, he was present to casual breakfast conversations about the mural. Our original slogan "Uptown a great place to be alive" didn't seem to fit in this time. We were talking about our learnings from the interviews about the many people who have come to Uptown, gotten their lives together and moved on. He said he would think about that and that evening he brought back the new slogan. I wrote it into the drawing and it met with constant approval from the frequent visitors to the continuing development of the mural design.

A woman from the **City of Chicago Department of Family Services** offices in the ICA building said "That's our motto."

While walking out the door from presenting the mural design to **Alderman Schiller**, she began describing a vision involving a new high school art class, in a window dressing project for a new shopping center using the slogan in each window. The slogan was the trigger for this reflection.

A high school group who had come to ICA to tour Uptown social service agencies asked me to tell about some people in the mural. I told about the Native American images, a wave of immigration in the fifties, moving to the cities, pow-wows, still a presence, the mother, baby and daughter. Sister Patricia from the **Aniwim Ojibwa Center**, located on the 2nd floor of the ICA, talked to me while I was finishing up. She said some of them had been talking about the Native American meaning in the mural. She said they were thinking that the man holding the baby could be changed into an Indian with the simple addition of a red headband. She explained the history of the American Indian Movement thus the meaning of the red and also just a little hair hanging over the shoulder. That brought all that area together -- the family, the dancing, the corn basket and dream catcher. I told Mamie she needed to learn to give that talk for future tours.

The the local block club president, asked permission to use an image from the mural on an invitation to the annual ball at the Aragon in November.

The success of involving the community is shown by the Uptown Commission president seeking us out to thank us for asking them for approval. "We are so grateful that you came to us before. Usually a mural goes up and we have to react."

Impact on Sheridan and Lawrence corner: The owner of the building wall was sitting in a chair watching me paint. He smiled and waved then pointed to a blank space near the sidewalk and said I could paint anything I wanted there. The next day he was out in front of the hairdresser business supervising the removal of an old sign frame. The week before as we were beginning to work, the corner business cleaned up their window display, repainted the trim around the windows, and repainted the background behind the neon lettering to a dark green. Then they repainted it again with a bright blue.



A passer by stops to watch.



Mamie Tucker showing her preliminary compositions made from Paul Noah's drawings.

CONCLUSION

The **eventfulness of this mural** is hard to get hold of but there is a tangible spirit which happened because of three things:

1. The **content** came from a broad spectrum of the neighborhood, continually growing and changing right up to the last day of painting.
2. The encounter with the **craft of painting** the mural. A lot of people were involved in some way with painting. Many questions were about how do you do that? ...And plenty of advice. And conversations about the displacement of hands-on work by the computer and the digital media in our present time.
3. The presence of ICA service **community** who had momentum and vision.

So thanks:

Mamie Tucker, creative assistant

Mike, fearless helper now on to another adventure

John Terdich, from Clear Channel Outdoor Chicago, assisted with the painting

Mr. Rotheimer and Mr. McGinn for giving permission to paint on their wall

Bill and Nancy Grow for facilitating the story gathering process

Mary Laura Jones, ICA Director of Building and Community Development

Ruth Reames, generous supporter of the CRV art program

The interviewers



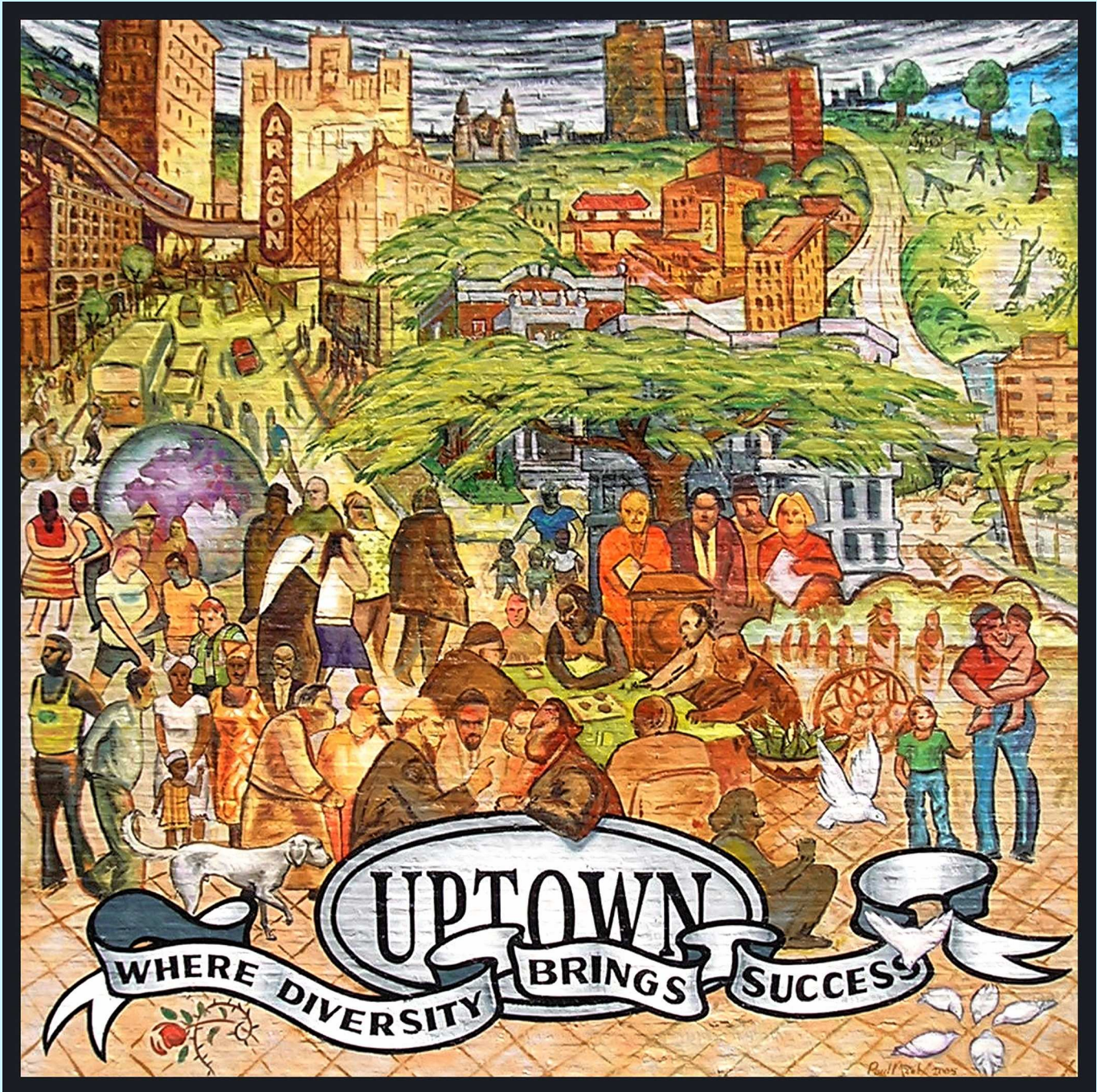
Paul Noah

"Every village around the world has in the deep recesses of its past an unbelievable story, and all you have to do is ask enough questions and it comes out. What a look on the villagers' faces when they see their story in print."

-- Joe Mathews from "Bending History"

Uptown Neighborhood Mural

Photo of the final painted rendering on the wall.
Summer 2005





Refurbished 2011 with a new orange trim, different wall color and UV resistant clear coat. Yellow color had noticeably faded from the southern exposure.



Summer 2020

The end is near for this painted version however it might yet live on by digital printing on vinyl attached to the wall.

The future of the building the mural is painted on is unclear. One half of parking lot has been sold. Large scale digital reproduction is common practice now and has the advantage of having a fresh image from the 300dpi digital photo taken at the time of completion and can be any size and attached to any other suitable wall. This image would need to be replaced every five years costing \$5K. An endowment would be helpful.

