

GIANTS OF EDMONTON MURAL "DEVOTION" HONOURS CANADIAN SOLDIERS

Last Summer, the City of Edmonton and Royal Canadian Legion Norwood Branch # 178 partnered to honor the Canadian Forces serving in Afghanistan by having a seven by twelve meter mural painted on the north exterior wall of the Branch Auditorium.

Devotion, by artist Kris Friesen, is the fourth mural commissioned by the Giants of Edmonton.

It is not every day that the artists have a bagpiper, tank and armoured personnel carrier at the unveiling of their work, but when a huge outdoor mural recognizes the contributions of the Canadian Forces, it comes with the territory.

"I sat beside a Colonel," says mural artist Kris Friesen of September's 2009 unveiling of the three-panel image and I was happy to hear him say that he liked it. Entitled "DEVOTION" the panels show a soldier leaving his wife and young son behind on a typical Canadian street to head into Afghanistan's sandy plains where civilians, including a woman and a little boy, are watching. "I wanted to show the home and away," says Friesen

Norwood Branch treasurer Dan Doyle is enthusiastic about the image. "The soldier is helping build our country and he is helping rebuild another country." He says, adding that the mural speaks to him because his son, also a father of a little boy, is about to enter the army.

Thousands of people view this mural everyday as they travel on the Rapid Transit from Northeast Edmonton to City Centre.

It is part of the City of Edmonton's Graffiti Management Program (GMP)'s attempt to counter graffiti with eye catching street art. "We are doing this as a way to beautify Edmonton, to show there is a difference between street art and graffiti, and to provide property owners with other options for trying to keep graffiti off their property," says Sharon Chapman, Graffiti Project Manager for Capital City Clean Up, City of Edmonton.

Giants is a collaboration between 630 Ched radio, which promotes the program and gathers votes for Giants subjects, and the City's Graffiti Management Program, which erected three other Giants in 2008 and 2009 : former Alberta Lieutenant-governor Lois Hole, sports enthusiast Joey Moss and Edmonton's dedicated volunteers.

Not only do the murals make the city more attractive, it's a way to recognize some of the people, events or landmarks that have come to symbolize what makes the city great.

"Murals are no guarantee that you won't have graffiti, but graffiti taggers have a tendency not to tag over the pieces of art," says Chapman. "Devotion is a fitting tribute to the work of our Canadian Forces and it's a valuable contribution to the city by creating beautiful art in our community. "we are extremely grateful to the Royal Canadian Legion Norwood Branch # 178, for working with us on this project," says Chapman. "We hope that they and the citizens of Edmonton will enjoy the mural for many years to come."

Royal Canadian Legion Norwood Branch # 178 is located on 11150 - 82 St., Edmonton, AB