

New Mural Arts Project celebrates transformation and recovery

Mural at Elwyn Philadelphia on Market Street

By Haywood Brewster
 UC Review Staff

Passers-by will have a new bright spot on their journey along West Market Street. Elwyn Philadelphia (formerly Elwyn Institute) is installing a grand mural, complete with a stunning 25-foot high stained-glass sunflower. It's just possibly the largest glass mosaic in the City.

Artist Eric Okdeh designed the mural, a joint-effort between the Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health, Elwyn Philadelphia, and the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program. It spans the entire height (53 feet) of the building and covers 3600 square feet of the Elwyn Philadelphia site at 4040 Market Street.

The theme of the mural is overcoming the stigma of mental illness through transformation to recovery. It features strong imagery, vibrant colors and powerful words that all have real-life inspirations.

As Jim Fennell, Director of Behavioral Health Outpatient and NewVisions Program at Elwyn Philadelphia, explains, "The Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health was responsible for the initial concept and funding for the mural. The Department wanted to create a mural that showed the transformation to recovery of behavioral health and wanted to have their six recovery units involved. Elwyn Philadelphia, which is one of the units, donated the mural space. Eric Okdeh came up with the idea to wrap the mural around the side of the building and the overall design."

continued on page 4

Eric Okdeh has been involved with the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program for ten years. During this time, he has been involved with between 70 and 80 projects. This particular project included the involvement of about 200 people – Elwyn clients and staff, as well as inmates at Graterford Prison with whom Okdeh conducts art workshops. The artist organized painting and poetry workshops at each of the six recovery units. Each participant was able to paint and contribute to the overall project.

"The painting was basically paint by numbers, which made it very user friendly," Jim Fennell explained. "As well as contributing to the final product, the participants fulfilled a more integral role. They were the inspiration for the imagery and words featured on the mural. As evidenced by the participant involvement in the workshops, the mural is truly a community event."

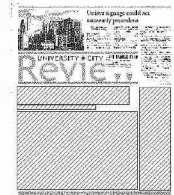
The mural itself provides a "unique" and "unusual" aspect to it. The mural was placed on a regular city building, not an abandoned or derelict building. Instead, the artist and the Department of Behavioral Health took a straightforward wall and wrapped the mural onto it. It is also unusual since it can be viewed on two sides

of the building, instead of just one.

The mural, which exemplifies the work at Elwyn Philadelphia, has created enthusiasm in the Elwyn community and the community at large.

"We're really happy with it," Jim Fennell says "The community was enthusiastic from the beginning. The clients and staff are excited about it. We take tours and walk-around the building to check on the progress. It's just amazing to see how great it really looks."

By funding the mural, the Department of Behavioral Health allows the people of the Philadelphia area to view the hard-work, determination, and joy that the transformation to recovery requires and gives. Elwyn Philadelphia, the mural site and recovery unit, is part of the transformation. Elwyn Philadelphia Behavioral Health Services serves adults and children age four and up with situational or persistent mental health issues, emotional problems, and behavioral challenges. The program seeks to promote healthy growth and psychological recovery by developing a creative, individualized treatment. This treatment helps each person acquire skills for living and learning in their most natural and least restrictive envi-



ronment.

Elwyn Philadelphia also implements their New Visions program, which is a recovery oriented and community integrated treatment that is based on a network of care. The program offers various tracks and levels of proficiency for the client, which helps achieve the goal to move the participant into the community.

The Mural Arts Program (MAP) is the nation's largest mural program. Since 1984, MAP has created over 2,800 murals and works of public art, which are now part of Philadelphia's civic landscape and a source of inspiration to the thousands of residents and visitors who encounter them, earning Philadelphia international recognition as the "City of Murals." MAP engages over 100 communities each year in the transformation of neighborhoods through the mural-making process. MAP's award-winning, free art education programs annually serve over 3,000 youth at sites throughout the city and at-risk teens through education outreach programs. MAP also serves adult offenders in local prisons and rehabilitation centers, using the restorative power of art to break the cycle of crime and violence in our communities. For further information, call 215-685-0750 or visit www.muralarts.org.

The Mural Arts Program creates over 100 murals each year in more than 100 communities and reclaims and revitalizes hundreds of

abandoned city lots. As well as creating murals, the Mural Arts Program runs art education classes throughout the city that seeks to engage under-served neighborhood youth. These classes are offered free of charge and seek to teach art, promote self-confidence, and foster life and job skills to the more than 3,000 youth each year that the program reaches.

The work of artist Eric Okdeh and the workshop participants can now be viewed at the Elwyn Philadelphia site located at 4040 Market Street. The official dedication of the mural will take place on Sept. 12, 2008, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Elwyn, formerly Elwyn Institute/Inc., was founded in 1852 and is a nonprofit, human services organization serving children and adults with a wide range of physical, developmental, sensory (deaf/blindness), and emotional disabilities, as well as those with mental illness; those with disabilities due to age; and those who are economically disadvantaged. Services include education, rehabilitation, and employment options, child welfare services, assisted living, respite care, campus and community therapeutic residential programs, and other supports for daily living. Elwyn, based in Media, PA, has satellite operations in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, as well as programs in California and Florida. For more information visit www.elwyn.org.



New Mural covers 3600 square feet of the Elwyn Philadelphia site at 4040 Market Street. It features strong imagery, vibrant colors and powerful words that all have real-life inspirations.