

Entertainment & Life

## **Artist works with Habitat for Humanity to add two new murals in Topeka's NOTO Arts District**

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Mural artist Beth King says the newest Habitat for Humanity mural signifies community, positivity and hope for the future.

King has painted several murals for Habitat for Humanity but was commissioned this summer to add two new pieces to their building in North Topeka as a backdrop for the future Redbud Park in the NOTO Arts and Entertainment District.

King, who has a fine arts degree, has practiced art her whole life. She said murals are important in neighborhoods because they are a “visible representation of love for the community.”

“When you love something, you want it to be beautiful and you want to maintain it,” she said. “It’s important for people living in a community to feel proud of their community and proud of where they’re from and happy to be there.”

Nikki MacMillan, director of community engagement at Habitat for Humanity, said the organization wants the murals to be welcome people to the NOTO Arts District.

“We knew that when we bought the building two years ago that was the ultimate goal, partially because we’re in the NOTO Arts District now and it just seems like a nice way to incorporate ourselves into the district,” MacMillan said. “We’re kind of the landmark building you see coming over the Kansas Avenue bridge, so we kind of wanted to make that a welcoming entrance in NOTO.”

King has experience with other nonprofits, which drew her to Habitat's project. MacMillan said Habitat chose King for its murals after a local referral and because of her experience working with people.

"She had the ability to work really well with our homeowner families," MacMillan said. "It was important to us that the families had a really good experience in this."

Habitat for Humanity and King worked together on a theme that would best suit the murals. King said Habitat gave her free range within what they were thinking.

"They said I could pretty much do whatever I wanted, as long as I was respectful of the idea that a bunch of people are going to be seeing it and they're a charitable family organization," King said. "I had a lot of creative control over what I produced."

King said the "ad astra per aspera" theme inspired her because of the phrase's meaning and its incorporation in the Kansas flag.

"I did the ad astra per aspera in some of my sketches because it's 'to the stars through difficulty,' and these families have had a lot of difficulty," King said. "I mostly tried to keep the fact that 'times have been hard but now they're better' in mind."

The murals' themes represent both the NOTO community and the families who have been helped by Habitat. Families suggested incorporating keys into the design, which is also a national theme for the Habitat for Humanity campaign.

"It sort of came back to this idea of not just what the home means to the families that we serve, but what it means to be a part of a community," MacMillan said. "It just kind of talks about the stability that the home provides for the families and how changing that is."

Habitat homeowner families volunteered their time to help paint, which King said created a community atmosphere she was looking for within the project.

“It was awesome, because everybody’s energy was so good and everyone was so positive and happy, and that was the great thing about it,” she said. “Everyone was just happy to help.”

The murals aren’t completely finished but will be within the next month. They can be seen on the west and east sides of the building off N. Kansas Avenue and N.W. Gordon Street.