

Paint It Forward

Artist creates a patriotic mural for a Post in Minnesota

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After six years in search of an artist to paint a mural that depicts VFW's values along a wall of Post 936 in Alexandria, Minn., Post Chaplain Ralph Berg found one in Tracy Anderson.

The 12-foot-by-8-foot mural captured an overwhelming approval from Post members during a presentation at a monthly Post meeting earlier this year.

"The military picture she painted impressed all our members because of its beauty and makeup, which depicted all the branches of military service," Berg said. "This was particularly pleasing to our members, and that same night the club unanimously approved the mural."

The mural, titled "Freedom For All," depicts the unity of service members in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard, both male and female of varying races. Above them, woven into a vanilla sky, a guardian angel looms over the men and women in uniform.

"The painting is meant to include all," Anderson said. "There's also the guardian angel holding a mighty sword and standing with these men and women, protecting and fighting with them."

The image also is accented by the red, white and blue of a large U.S. Flag in the backdrop that adds the final touches to an exceptionally crafted mural.

"The U.S. Flag behind them implies how such a symbol is woven into all the history, lives and deaths of the brave men and women who are fighting for our country," Anderson added.

Anderson, professional painter for about 10 years, found the inspiration for the painting in her brother, a veteran dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

"He had asked me to paint him a painting specific to him," Anderson said. "As I was working

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on his painting, I could see how much it was helping him deal with his pain. It was the impact it had on him that made me want to do something with my gift of being a visual storyteller to help other veterans with PTSD, so I began researching and creating the composition for 'Freedom for All'."

By the time Berg reached out to Anderson with his idea for a mural to represent Post 936, the painting he had been waiting six years to find had been completed and ready to be showcased.

"He loved it, but he wanted the flag to be brighter," Anderson said. "I came up with the idea to super impose my painting onto a large flag, which pleased Ralph and the Alexandria VFW so much that it was unanimously approved."

In order to preserve the mural at Post 836, Anderson printed the image onto a large sheet of vinyl and mounted it onto a special backing sturdy enough to withstand the harsh Minnesota winters. She also created multiple sizes of the painting for veterans who might want to have their own personal mural at home.

"My desire with this painting is to honor those men and women and give back not only with my painting talent but to give back a portion of each sale to help veterans," Anderson said. "I am still hoping to join forces with Gary Sinise, but until that happens I will donate it back to multiple veteran charities."