

# H-F student art project will put 'larger-than-life' portraits on display

BY MARILYN THOMAS

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For the next several weeks, the walls in the villages of Homewood and Flossmoor will be covered with 100 giant-sized portraits of residents smiling.

"Smiles are Contagious: An Inside Out Project for Homewood and Flossmoor" is the name of the larger-than-life headshots display. It is an art project undertaken by Homewood-Flossmoor High School students in the Fine Arts Department's media, visual and performing arts MVP Academy. The intent is to show residents smiling.

"The kids pitched 10 different ideas, and the villages picked one that was just about smiles. We've been without smiles for many months now," said teacher J.R. Willard-Rose referring to smiles being hidden by masks due to the pandemic.

Each village has 50 photos for display. The 4.5 x 3-foot black and white photos were pasted onto walls with a flour and water paste. The pictures, printed on biodegradable paper, will come down on their own, depending on the weather. Students will paste photos at a lower level, and village staff will put the others up.

Willard-Rose had planned to do this project in spring 2020, but it got shelved after schools shut down mid-March due to the pandemic. He is happy to have the Inside Out Project on this year's calendar. He



Marilyn Thomas/H-F Chronicle

Annie Calderon smiled for the camera at Homewood-Flossmoor High School as part of the MVP Program's "Smiles" project. More than 100 people volunteered to be photographed for larger-than-life portraits.

said it's a great culmination project for the seniors in the Collaborative Arts Seminar.

He left all the planning efforts to the 35 students in the class. H-F senior Mia Johnson-Chaison said getting this project approved and photography scheduled took a lot of work.

"We had meetings with the villages, and we set up social media pages. We had to get the (photography permission) forms that had to go out, and we had a meeting for Inside/Out directors," she explained.

After the request for volunteers was posted on social media, Willard-Rose said they got more than the 100 people needed. The models were all ages.

Valerie Litchfield, a cancer survivor, learned about the project through social media.

"I actually think (the photography) is a good statement for people who are fighting cancer. I think it's a statement of strength and vulnerability, but vulnerability is strength," the Flossmoor resident said.

"It's a fun project. We're starting to reveal ourselves after this period of darkness, so I kind of think the timing now is perfect."

Homewood resident Ayanna Walker came with her daughter Kendalyn Walker, a student at Churchill School. Walker said she learned about the Inside Out Project online and registered, adding: "I thought it'd be a good opportunity to participate."

Homewood teen Nizhoni Ward said she wanted to be present on the wall "to show my support for Homewood." She represented the village in the Miss Teen Illinois USA competition in May.

The 100 H-F photos are part of the international Inside Out Project begun in 2011 by French photographer JR. The Inside Out Project describes the initiative as "a platform that helps communities around the world to stand up for what they believe in and spark global change locally." Nearly 500,000 people in 138 countries have been photographed for the project.

H-F seniors Paige Bush-Porco and Elizabeth Scanland were photographers taking two or three shots of every person. The volunteers were photographed against a background of black dots, one of the requirements of the Inside Out Project.

Willard-Rose said the H-F photos were sent to Inside Out Project headquarters in New York where they were cropped for tight headshots, balanced for contrast and resolution. The super-large format photos were printed for free.



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