

LAKE COUNTY NEWS-SUN

Library dedicates ‘Love Letter to Waukegan’ mural; ‘It shows the diversity of the community’



Artist Gaby Escovar gazes at the mural she just finished creating outside the Waukegan Public Library. (Steve Sadin/For the Lake County News-Sun)



By **STEVE SADIN** | Lake County News-Sun

PUBLISHED: November 14, 2024 at 2:32 PM CST

Gaby Escovar is an artist and Waukegan native whose “Love Letter to Waukegan” is painted as a mural on the wall by the entrance to the Waukegan Public Library and extends around the corner to the wall on Clayton Street.

Inspired by her trips to the library as a youngster and some of famous author Ray Bradbury’s writings, she said she painted images of children displaying the diversity of Waukegan. Some of them are among large dandelions.

“Children take it as a flower, and don’t see it as a weed,” Escovar said. “For them it is an item you can make a wish on, making a special relationship with a dandelion. It will remind people I know of their childhood.”



Children were invited to create their own art. (Steve Sadin/For the Lake County News-Sun)

Library officials, Escovar and others dedicated the “Love Letter to Waukegan” mural Wednesday outside the building in front of the plaque recognizing the artwork which is now one of several in downtown Waukegan.

Not the first person to find inspiration at the library as a youngster, Escovar said she is aware Bradbury spent hours in the library as a child as well, and some of his inspiration for books like “Dandelion Wine” came from his youth in Waukegan.

“He was an inspiration,” she said. “He loved the library. It helped inspire his book, ‘Dandelion Wine.’ Waukegan was part of a lot of his stories. He tied dandelions to wine. He saw the connection, too.”

Library Executive Director Tiffany Verzani said the idea for the mural began when the Waukegan Arts Council announced a grant program. A proposal was written applying for the grant. It was awarded, the search for an artist began and Escovar started painting in June.

“What better way to spotlight the library as a place where all are welcome, and a place that uplifts the human spirit, and provides opportunity for discovery and friendship,” Verzani said.

Selling her first artwork to people who asked for a painting 10 years ago, Escovar said her career as a professional artist began after she earned a master’s degree in fine arts in 2019 from the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California. She cannot remember a time she was not painting.

Before she started painting the mural in June, Escovar said she brainstormed with people at the library about what to paint. Showing children and the diversity of the community were required ingredients. The dandelions were her idea.

“I wanted to show the diversity of Waukegan,” she said. “I showed people I remember from my childhood. They are jumping and skipping. It’s not just skin color. There is a person in a wheelchair.”



Talking about the mural are, from left, Jane Waller, Gaby Escovar and Escovar's mother. (Steve Sadin/For the Lake County News-Sun)

Jane Waller, a co-chair of the arts council, said as she looked at the mural it demonstrated a lot about Waukegan and its people. She likes the focus on children, since the library is a place for them to learn.

"I love the way this celebrates everything about Waukegan," she said. "This is where kids congregate to learn. It shows the diversity of the community. I like the children's smiles."

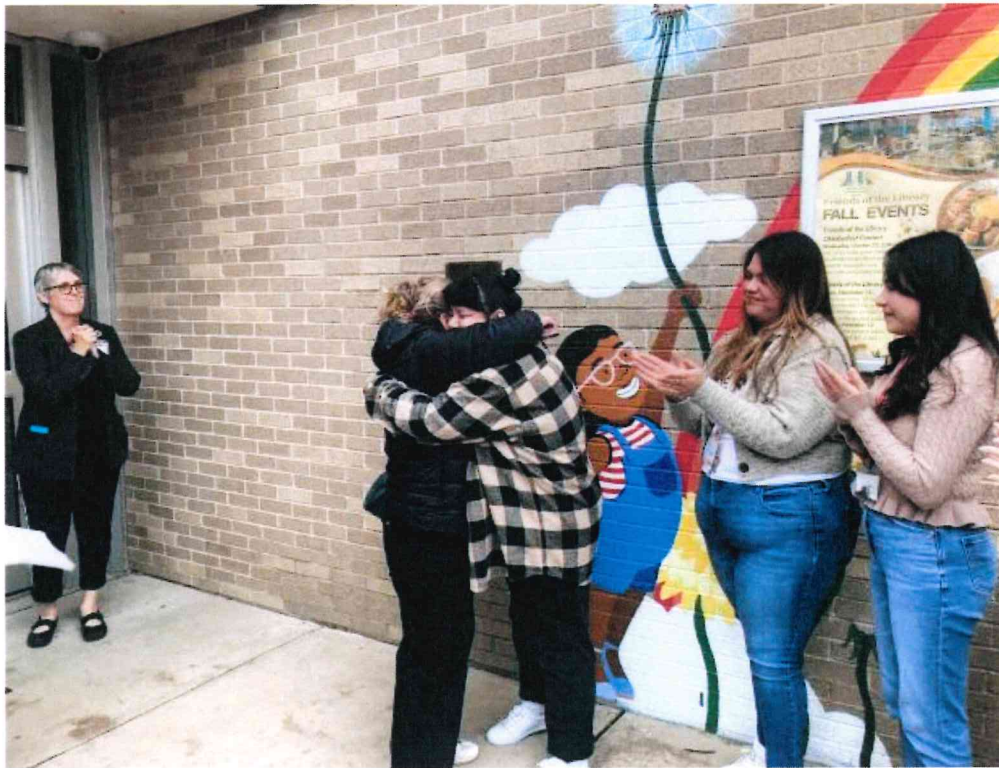


Some of Gaby Escovar's inspiration came from her time in the library as a child as it did for Ray Bradbury. (Steve Sadin/For the Lake County News-Sun)

Murals have popped up in downtown Waukegan at several intersections on Genesee Street as part of a city project to enhance the area. Another was painted on the wall of a building just north of the intersection of Genesee and Lake Street. Mayor Ann Taylor welcomes the new addition.

"This is refreshing for the city," Taylor said. "You see all the people who have come to make Waukegan home."

Along with dedicating the mural, Verzani said children were invited to attend the event, doing their own art projects. The youngsters were sitting at tables making buttons, stickers and drawings.



Gaby Escovar, third from left, and her mother hug at the dedication of Escovar's mural at the Waukegan Public Library. (Steve Sadin/For the Lake County News-Sun)

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