

Mosaic on a Stick leaves its imprint on Snelling Avenue with community support

By JAN WILLMS

Mosaic on a Stick has not been open very long. It celebrates its second anniversary this month. But it has dedicated itself, along with other businesses, to brightening up Snelling Avenue.

In a project that began last August, the business at 595 N. Snelling, owned by Maria Ricke and Lori Greene, has opened its doors to train about 25 volunteers in creating medallions. The medallions have been mounted in planters along Snelling.

The project was funded with a STAR grant received by the neighborhood through the Hamline-Midway Coalition, a community-based nonprofit.

"We trained two groups of volunteers on how to use the tools," said Ricke. "We had open studio sessions, where anyone could come in. They could bring their friends and their children, learn to use the cutting tools and pick their own color palette."

Numerous patterns were available to choose from. Each medallion was 10 inches around, and it took 17 medallions to go around one planter.

She said volunteers would choose the medallion, glue pieces on mesh. They would then get mounted on plaster and grouted, filling in the spaces between the tiles.

"Our goal is to get ten planters done before this winter," Ricke said.

Mosaic on a Stick, with its brightly colored walls of purple, pink and lime green, serves as a seller of mosaic supplies, an art studio and a space for teaching classes about mosaic design and



Maria Ricke of Mosaic on a Stick demonstrates how tile medallions will be cemented to Snelling Avenue planters. (Photo by Terry Faust)

sculpture.

It arose from a discussion in a parking lot, according to Greene. She and Ricke had been active in a group of community organizers and artists, working on creating solutions. Although Ricke had a degree in peace studies and Greene in art, the two shared an interest in mosaic. They were friends with Jun-Li Wang, a community organizer with the Ham-

line Midway Coalition.

"She recommended we start our business in this neighborhood," Greene said. She and Ricke met regularly with Dave Gagne, who at the time was executive director of Hamline Midway.

"He looked over our budget, talked to businesses and tried to help us find the best location," Greene said. "It was kind of like having a dad help us out," she

said.

Greene said that since opening the business, she has personally moved to the Snelling neighborhood.

"I love this area," she said. "And people have thanked us for choosing this area. It's an incredibly warm community."

At a recent meeting of the Snelling Avenue Business Initiative (SABI), the planter project was deemed a fantastic success by Everett Janssen, owner of Shirts Unlimited and a member of the business group.

The medallions have been completed and need be installed around two more planters. "We just need a string of warm-weather days," Ricke said.

Janssen said that Hamline University provided the plants for

the planters and also paid the city to water twice a week.

"Master gardeners can hopefully work with Hamline when they do their plant ordering in November," Janssen said, adding that the gardeners can determine which plants will grow best.

SABI also discussed banners for the avenue.

According to Michael Jon Olson, current executive director of Hamline Midway Coalition, only the city can do the work on the banners. The standard size is a 30 by 60 inch bracketing system, required to have wind-deflecting abilities.

The cost of putting a banner on each pole was estimated to be \$500, and those in attendance discussed ways of funding.

Jonathon Sage-Martinson of Sparc, a group whose mission is to create and maintain healthy, affordable and sustainable neighborhoods by improving residential and commercial vitality in the Hamline Midway, said that Hamline University and the State Fair might help with infrastructure costs.

The group also advocated winter lighting for Snelling businesses, suggesting white lights be put up after Thanksgiving.

"We need to move quickly and informally this year," Sage-Martinson said. "We should start the day after Thanksgiving, and have the lights left on late each day."

Allison Sharkey, a new Sparc employee, said the merchants could compete for the block with the most impressive displays, with some type of food offered as a reward.

The projects discussed all focused on improving the environment and the looks of Snelling Avenue.

"People see things happening, and it might encourage them to get on board," Ricke said.

As with the owners of Mosaic on a Stick, they might strive to make the commercial corridor of Snelling Avenue a better place to work and live.

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Snelling Avenue area merchants light up winter streetscape

Which block along Snelling and its sidestreets will be the most beautifully lit this winter? Area business owners are challenging each other to brighten up their storefronts with window displays of white lights during these winter evenings.

"The winters are long and dark, and we want to brighten up our businesses, Snelling Avenue, and our community," says Diane Brennan owner of Fusion Salon. [Merchants will be turning on the lights the day after Thanksgiving.] The block with the loveliest displays will celebrate with locally made treats. You can find your white lights at Hamline Hardware, 755 North Snelling Avenue. Other businesses that will likely be displaying winter cheer with storefront lights include Mosaic on a Stick, Shirts Unlimited, Ginkgo Coffeehouse, Lloyd's Pharmacy and Metro Automotive.

Local business and property owners in the Snelling area are coming together for a gathering of SABI, the Snelling Avenue Business Initiative, to discuss winter lighting, available funds for façade improvements, and other initiatives to liven up the street [like the newly mosaic-ed planters along the Avenue]. Join us for lunch at Ginkgo Coffeehouse at Snelling and Minnehaha from 12 noon-1 p.m. on Wednesday, November 22nd. For more info, contact Allison at Sparc, 651-488-1039.

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