



Water, Land, and Sky

A word from the mural designer, Rhea Ewing....

When I was first approached by Dane Arts Mural Arts about this design, I knew I was in for a complex and rewarding project. I was not disappointed. Former mayor Bob Miller started out by giving me and the other DAMA artists a tour of Monona. He spoke with pride about the city's history, cultural heritage, and natural resources. Ken Whitehorse also spoke with me extensively about the area's land and history, and was an invaluable part of the design process. He explained the history of the Ho Chunk Nation and their perspective on the land. Deb Whitehorse shared photographs and stories about her husband, local artistic legend Harry Whitehorse. Students at MG21 also shared what they loved about Monona and gave me feedback on my designs. All of these voices were needed to reach the final image.

The mural was painted with the help of community members from all over Monona, including MG21, Monona Senior Center, Winnequah Elementary School, and members of the Ho Chunk Nation.

Harry Whitehorse: WWII Veteran and World-Renowned Artist

Harry Whitehorse's artwork is breathtaking, and I was honored to pay homage to him here. His work can be found throughout the region and the world. His sculptures and paintings are unique and depict a range of subjects, primarily focusing on Ho Chunk heritage and veteran experiences. The Ho Chunk Nation has one of the highest rates of military enlistment in the country. The Ho Chunk philosophy is that it is important to protect their aboriginal land, regardless of who 'owns' it.

Harry Whitehorse's artwork can be found throughout the world. Some of his pieces are right here in Monona: at City Hall, on Lakeland Avenue, and at 5001 Monona Drive. You can see more of his artwork on his website, www.harrywhitehorse.com

In this mural, Harry Whitehorse carries an eagle staff, the traditional flag of the Ho Chunk Nation and other American Indian tribes, in honor of his service as a warrior and protector of our community. He also carries a paintbrush as a nod to his many artistic accomplishments.

Scenes from Monona

Every piece of this mural comes from stories and experiences around Monona.

The wigwam is in honor of the Ho Chunk Nation. An adult and child's hands build the wigwam together, symbolizing that this is a living tradition that will be carried into the future. Beans, squash, and corn (the Three Sisters) celebrate the land's prosperity.

The eagle flying overhead was specifically requested by Bob Miller, who loves the many bald eagles that call Monona home and can frequently be seen nesting and hunting along the waterways. Monona's striking sunsets are a powerful image of the area, and I was given many breathtaking photographs of the sunset over the water.

Wetlands are an essential part of a healthy ecosystem, and Monona's wetlands are a treasure. Wetland grasses are shown weaving together as a hint of the usefulness of wetland plants for making baskets, rugs, and other crafts in Ho Chunk tradition. The frog in the mural is a Blanchard's Cricket Frog (*Acris blanchardi*), an endangered species in Wisconsin. Amphibians are often studied as indicators of an area's overall health, so this frog's presence is a reminder of the wetland's fragility.

The goose, dragonfly, and blackbird are all species found in the area. Along with the biplane *The Spirit of St Louis*, these sections of the mural honor the sky and celebrate Monona's history as an air field along with the importance of our natural flyers. The fish are all species that live in Monona's waters, including a large mouth bass, panfish, walleye trout, and sturgeon. Each species was requested by a different resident. The muskrat carrying flowers is from one of my own memories of Monona, when I saw a muskrat carrying a huge bouquet of wildflowers back to its nest.

Of all the conversations I had about Monona, the overarching theme was one of love and protection. Monona is full of people who care about each other and the land on which they live. The squirrel with her baby on the far left of the mural symbolizes that love.

"Don't waste anything, we have everything we need."

—Annie Greencrow Whitehorse, environmentalist.

This has been an amazing project to work on. The generosity, thoughtfulness, and hard work of everyone involved has brought my idea to life more beautifully than I could have dreamed. I am honored to have collaborated with Monona on this work of art.

-Rhea Ewing