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Art faculty, students aim to inspire kids

September 1, 2021



UNG visual arts faculty member Craig Wilson and some of his students helped paint a mural this summer at the Midtown Villages at Melrose low-income housing complex.

Article By: [Clark Leonard](#)

University of North Georgia (UNG) [visual arts](#) faculty and students aim to inspire kids at a Gainesville, Georgia, low-income housing complex to take an interest in art by involving them in it.

[Craig Wilson](#), associate professor of visual arts, and some of his students assisted the Gainesville Housing Authority and community volunteers in painting a mural this summer at Midtown Villages at Melrose. [Jeffrey Repko](#), assistant professor of visual arts, crafted a sculpture depicting industrial tools that's at the front of the complex.

The mural honors six community leaders from Gainesville's history and present: Gene Beckstein, Faye Bush, E.E. Butler, Norma Hernandez, Beulah Rucker, and Johnny Vardeman. Some of the children from the apartments helped paint the mural.

"It's not just about getting the kids involved in art," Wilson said. "It's also about building community."

Jim Chapman is the special projects coordinator for the Gainesville Housing Authority. He came up with the mural idea, including the first mural UNG assisted with in 2017. Mary Frances Hull led the mural project, with assistance from UNG and other community members. Chapman said he wants the art partnership to open children's eyes to new possibilities.

"The bottom line is we want them to dream big, crazy big," Chapman said. "And if they can envision and picture a better future, we can help them achieve it. The tough part is being able to see it."

Assisting him are Wilson and Repko. Both are on the board for the housing authority's Public Arts in Public/Affordable Housing (PAPAH) initiative and will teach art workshops at the apartments this fall. Repko will also use a UNG [Liberal Education and America's Promise \(LEAP\) into Action grant](#) to help his students create sculptures at the apartments.

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Peyton Holley is a junior from Williamson, Georgia, pursuing a [Bachelor of Fine Arts](#) at UNG.

She began painting within the past year, so the chance to combine her passions of art and community service was an easy choice.

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PEYTON HOLLEY

UNG junior pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts

"It's great to know that people are going to see this art and know the collaboration that went into it," Holley said. "If it inspires at least one person, it's worth it."

Wilson is grateful to see Chapman's vision of art helping young people come to fruition.

"It's making art part of their everyday lives," Wilson said. "It's a unique idea. I'm so excited and proud of Jim. I'm proud of Gainesville for backing it with money and support."

In addition to UNG and the Gainesville Housing Authority, the PPAH initiative includes partners such as the Quinlan Visual Arts Center, Collaborative Housing Solutions, the North Georgia Community Foundation, and the Marta Chapman Memorial Foundation.

Repko looks forward to the possibilities of his students creating sculptures and helping with the workshops this fall.

"Our goal is to get UNG students off campus and into the community to have an art experience that's not in the bubble of a college campus," Repko said. "It acts as an entryway into their professional careers. We want them to be prepared for their jobs once they graduate."

[Contact the Author](#)



Lindsay Bailey

2020-21 Div

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