



Community mural unveiled in North Richmond

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RICHMOND, Calif. (BCN) - Kids danced, music blasted, chalk butterflies took shape on the sidewalk and red, blue and orange colors glowed on the mural on North Richmond's Rancho Market at the mural's unveiling Friday.

Dozens of North Richmond residents worked for over a year with artists and public officials to transform the formerly blighted storefront at 500 Market Ave. in North Richmond, an unincorporated Contra Costa County community.

"This is really about the fabric of community - bringing people together," Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia, the moving force behind the mural, told the crowd. "I'm proud of the people of North Richmond."

After Gioia spoke, DJ Gary blasted "Celebration," Kool & the Gang's 1980 paean to good times, as people of all colors and ages strolled down the closed-off street outside the market.

Before the mural was painted, neighbors of the store had approached Gioia with concerns about the store's painted-over graffiti and bullet holes. In response, in 2017, the supervisor brought in Love Your Block, a grant-funded city program that helps residents reimagine their neighborhoods.

The city of Richmond Arts & Culture Commission kicked in a mini-grant of \$7,500 to pay the lead artists and apprentices. Kelly-Moore Paints in San Pablo and Home Depot in El Cerrito donated paint and materials.

"It's just amazing when we can all come together to mingle in peace and harmony," said Maria Aviles, who has lived in North Richmond for 17 years. "We want safe streets so we can come together as friends."

A panoply of Richmond organizations was represented by booths up and down the street. Rich City Rides, an organization that sells and repairs bikes at a bike shop and offers an Earn-A-Bike program for youth, was on hand, as well as the Arts & Culture Commission and a face-painter.

As the DJ played Michael Jackson's "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough," lead muralist and project manager Richard Muro Salazar showed off the completed work of art.

The mural encompasses two exterior walls of the store, with a blue wave starting on one side, giving way to a cornucopia of fruit and vegetables. The mural also showcases fabrics of different communities: Mexican, Nigerian, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese.

"That's a lot of the North Richmond community," said Salazar, pointing to a Mexican serape portrayed on the side of the building. "That's why we named the mural 'Fabric of Unity.'"

Vanessa "Agana" Espinoza was the assistant lead artist on the project, and Alfonso Leon, Jahira Fragozo and Jacinto Mingura worked as apprentices. Gioia, members of the community and the muralists all wielded paintbrushes at the building.

Stephanie Ny of Love Your Block said Lucky Braimah, the owner of the store, was on board with the effort from the beginning.

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