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Arlington Hts. glass studio helps woman finish Sandy Hook tribute



Video: Stained Glass For Sandy Hook

Melissa Silverberg

When 26 children and adults were shot and killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012, people all over the country were inspired to donate, send letters and perform acts of kindness to remember the tragedy.

Patti Muller, who lives in New Orleans, was inspired to teach herself a new form of artwork to create a stained glass "quilt" remembering the victims. Now, more than 18 months after the shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, Muller is in Arlington Heights finishing her artwork and hoping it will motivate others to make a change.

Muller had been teaching herself various art techniques at the time of the shooting, but after Sandy Hook, she made her first attempt at glass fusing.

"This was a horrific tragedy, but I tried to create something beautiful out of it," Mueller said while working on the project Wednesday.

While Muller was able to do much of the glass cutting and fusing work at home over the past year and a half, she came to Suevel Studios, a stained-glass business in Arlington Heights, to put all the pieces into one larger panel and put on a few finishing touches.

She found the studio online and felt a connection with the Suevel family that owns the shop.

Eric Suevel, who is a full-time Des Plaines paramedic, said the message hits home no matter where people live.

"There are shootings in Chicago and all over the place. From more than 1,000 miles away, we have a connection, and I'm so happy Suevel Studios could help her finish this project," he said.

For a first-timer, Suevel said, Muller's project is coming out surprisingly well.

"You almost have to wonder if someone is guiding her because it's coming out so clean," he said.

Each square of glass that makes up the patchwork of the quilt-like panel has a different color background, a heart adorned with wings and the first initial of a student who was shot -- all in alphabetical order like they would be in a classroom. Those pieces are surrounded by six squares with the initials of the teachers and adults killed at Sandy Hook fused onto apples with wings. The teacher and student squares are connected by glass plates with vines pressed between them.

"It's like the teachers are wrapping themselves around the kids to protect them, because that's what they did," Muller said.

Muller has been working off photos of each victim submitted by their families and said she feels she has come to know each one as she makes his or her square on the quilt. She hopes the finished project looks like 26 angels flying.

Muller works full time for a large hospital system in New Orleans, but every night and weekend since December 2012 she could be found in her home studio working on the glass quilt. It's been fused together at nearly 1,400 degrees from more than 200 pieces of glass and will weigh more than 50 pounds.

Muller will donate the finished project to The Sandy Hook Foundation and hopes that the panel will find a home in Newtown, Connecticut, or possibly travel as a tribute to the students and teachers lost in the shooting.

She also plans to have an image of the panel put on postcards, which she hopes people will buy and send to their congressmen to encourage stricter gun control laws.

"These were first-graders in Connecticut," Muller said. "If we can't protect them, then shame on us."

Eric Suevel's son, Justin, 21, was touched by the project and all that it represents.

"It goes beyond a political statement. That's the power of art," he said. "How can we live in the most powerful country on Earth and these kids were killed where they were supposed to be safe? That's the message. That's the power of art; it gets to what really matters."

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