Vallejo decorates Georgia Street



Gail Manning, left and Richard Lemke, right, present the new banners to the Vallejo City Council at the Tuesday, Dec. 10 council meeting.

By MATTHIAS GAFNI, Vallejo Times-Herald staff writer

Fifty new banners, created by local and Bay Area artists, will grace light and street poles along downtown Vallejo's Georgia Street starting today.

Those in charge of creating the new banners presented the colorful work to the City Council on Tuesday night and city crews will begin replacing the old banners today and Thursday from the waterfront to the 500 block of Georgia Street.

The 3-by-7 foot banners, made of double-sewn, vinylized canvas with long-lasting ink, have a 5-to-7 year life expectancy, said Vallejo artist Carlo Carlucci, who designed half the banners with the help of fellow Vallejoan Molly Barr.





These are just two of the banners that have been placed along downtown Georgia Street.

"It's based on the diversity of Vallejo and community," Carlucci said.

Downtown organizations started the banner project two years ago after the city decided to replace the banners but only could fund the brackets.

"I think the artists got us excited. We had no idea what we were getting into," said Richard Lemke, owner of Mr. Ric Men's Clothing, 629 Marin St., and chairman of the Downtown Merchant Association's Banner Committee that was formed in March.

"When the city made a decision to spend millions to go through to the waterfront (on Georgia Street), we thought we'd make a statement from the ferry to the downtown," Lemke said. "I hope it will be a very positive thing, that yes, something is happening in downtown. The revitalization is starting."

Lemke added that 21 new businesses have arrived in the downtown area since January.

Lemke joined other downtown supporters Tuesday at 401 Georgia St., the home of the Downtown Merchant Association, Vallejo Main Street and Central Core Restoration Corp., to display the new banners.

The 25 arts banners cost \$15,000 and were funded by various downtown business owners. The artists received \$2,000 for winning the contest.

The duo, selected after a Bay Area-wide contest, chose six background colors that were "nice but not clichéd," and coincided with six themes, Carlucci said: blue for the marina, purple for the architecture-heritage, yellow for the arts, green for the farmer's market, taupe for the museums and red for shopping.

The designs were first done as hand sketches, scanned photo alterations and Photoshop drawings, then were brought to a printer.

The banners will replace the old blue and yellow banners with generic images, some missing and torn, that have lined Georgia Street for years. Each lamp post or street pole will have two banners side-by-side.

The city paid for all new double brackets, which will be positioned lower, and the removal of the old banners and installation of the new ones.

On the street-side will be the Carlucci-Barr collaborations, and on the sidewalk-side will be 25 more photo banners called "Faces of Vallejo." The similar-sized banners, with different photos on each side, include portraits of over 100 Vallejo families and individuals who volunteered to be part of the project at the 2001 and 2002 Unity Day celebrations. Well-known photographer Nita Winter, of Marin City, photographed the images.

Those banners cost \$20,000 and were funded by different organizations and sponsors.

Gail Manning, a member of Vallejo Main Street, helped coordinate the photographic banners. She said a personal touch was needed on the new signs.

"What really makes Vallejo great are the people that live here," Manning said.

"The committee wanted to not just buy generic banners you see all over the Bay Area," she said. "We wanted something really specific to our community."

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