



The full mural as of June 10.
PHOTO BY JESS MERCER

Bille Estrada, owner of the Skyway Antique Mall (6118 Skyway), was approached by Mercer and her team, and said she loved the concept of honoring the town's history. Her family is from Paradise: Bille Road is named after her great grandfather, and Bille Park after her grandfather.

She and her late husband, Don, opened the mall in 2000, and they closed it for two and a half years after the fire. He died in November 2020.

"We always talked about a mural," she said. "He would be delighted to see that mural; he would love it."

The mural doesn't just honor the past but captures the hope and resilient spirit of the town, she said. The building itself represents resiliency as well, Mercer added: It was one of the few left standing after the blaze.

"I think people appreciate that Paradise is going to be here a long time—it's coming back," Estrada said. "It's worth it."

Healing together

Corinne Mercer (no relation to Jess) said she learned about the mural after seeing open calls online for community members interested in getting involved. She's an artist but has never shared her work publicly, she said.

She arrived happy to paint a single leaf and ended up working closely with Mercer, Ferchaud and Tiffany Russell—an artist who, like Corinne, also is new to a project like this—for weeks.

Corinne said she was especially honored to help work on the interior of the heart at the center of the mural. She had a heart attack after



Iris Natividad painted a daffodil on the Skyway Antique Mall mural in honor of her partner, Andrew Downer (pictured on her phone), who perished in the Camp Fire.

PHOTO BY ASHIAH SCHARAGA

the Camp Fire. For her, this project symbolizes not only her emotional but her physical recovery in the aftermath of the disaster.

Corinne grew up in Paradise and lived there over 50 years. She lost her home, but her mother's survived, and that's where she has since resettled.

"My heart belongs in Paradise. To be able to be part of the inside of the heart, I can't even describe what it means," she said. "It's been extremely healing for me."

Along those same lines, Ferchaud, a fire refugee, said he comes by to do detail work and shading but mostly leaves the ownership of the piece to the rest of the

community. Like all of the work he's done since the fire, he said it's been therapeutic.

"This is a whole community thing—that's what's important," he said.

Jess Mercer told the CN&R that the mural has been cathartic for many reasons: honoring those who died in the fire, witnessing the community support and kindness the muralists have received and creating a space for new and experienced artists to laugh, cry and grieve together.

"I know I gave an opportunity for so many people to come and share space at the same time," she said. "The emotional part of it, which is to thread us all together for a common purpose, was reached the first day we started painting and it's been blossoming and blossoming."

"I feel very connected to my home." □

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