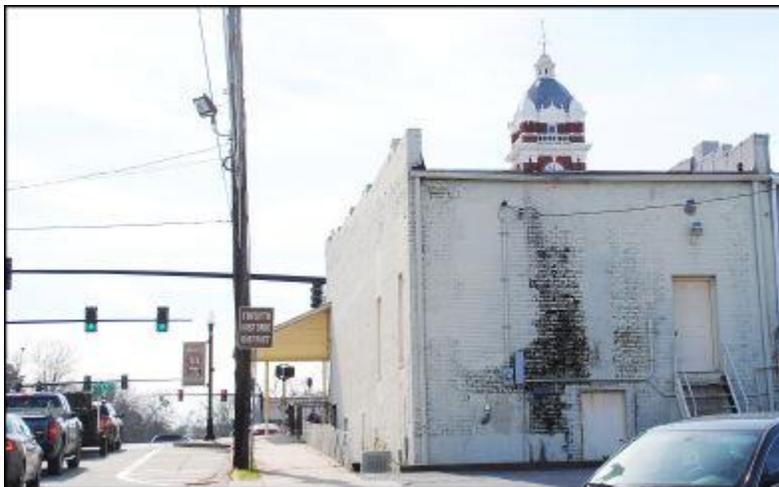




Train mural to welcome travelers on N. Lee St.

- By Diane Glidewell news@mymcr.net January 11, 2017



By May there will be a mural with a historic train theme on this building that 12,000 cars pass each day as they drive toward downtown Forsyth.

Forsyth will soon see the city's first mural begin to take shape on the back of the Ham & Jenkins building at the corner of W. Johnston and N. Lee Streets. The mural will look out over the city parking lot across from the Welcome Center on North Lee Street and will reflect Forsyth's historic ties to the railroad.

Forsyth Main Street beat out competition for a Georgia Council for the Arts Vibrant Communities grant for \$5,000 for the mural a few months ago. The city will match the grant with another \$5,000. Gilda Stanbery, executive director of Forsyth's Convention &

Visitors Bureau, wrote the application for the grant and is soliciting proposals from artists. A committee will select the person to design and paint what is sure to become one of the most recognizable landmarks in the city.

Artists are to submit letters of interest by Jan. 15 and complete proposals by Jan. 30. The winning finalist will be notified on Feb. 19. The artist must begin work by March 15 and complete the installation by May 29. Completion by the end of May is a requirement of the Georgia Council for the Arts grant.

Stanbery said that the historic train theme is an important part of Forsyth's heritage. It has grown in interest since Forsyth held its first Historic Train Festival in 2014 to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the first run of the passenger train linking Macon to Barnesville.

The Historic Train Festival has become a successful annual event, and efforts over the last two-plus years to secure a suitable site for a Train Museum in Forsyth have also increased awareness of the significance and widespread interest in the legacy of the railroad.

"People think of the old trains as the heartbeat of the area," said Stanbery.

The site chosen for the mural is just across the railroad tracks as one enters downtown Forsyth from I-75 Exit 187, one of the gateways to the city. Stanbery said that according to the most recent Georgia Department of Transportation study, 12,000 cars pass in front of the site every day.

"It's a very important gateway," said Stanbery. "We not only want to convey the message, 'Come and stay,' but also that it's who we are, where we've been. You're implying the future as well."

She said there will be children on school buses looking at the mural every morning and people on their way to work who will get the message from it.

The city is keeping the exact design of the mural open for the artist's interpretation. The artist only has to use the historic train theme and work within the dimensions of the building. What the artist has to do to win the job is to convince the selection committee that he or she has the knowledge, experience and talent to create a quality mural.

The work has to begin with the right preparation of the 'canvas' so that the work will last for a reasonable number of years without peeling or fading. Mayor Eric Wilson has said that he would like to see several murals in Forsyth, creating a positive, unique image of the city. It is important that this first mural set a standard of quality for other works to follow.

Stanbery said that she found an article on the top muralists in Georgia and contacted them individually in an effort to secure the best for the project.

"It is our sincere desire for this project to serve as a catalyst for future murals and public art projects," said Wilson. "We know a great city offers not only excellent services and resources, but it also serves as a cultural hub."

In fact, Stanbery has already applied for a grant for a mural with a law enforcement theme. The city became eligible for that grant through the state Tourism Product Development Team that visited Forsyth last April.

Stanbery said Benson Ham, who owns the building where the mural will be, will be one of those who helps pick the right artist. His willingness to be a part of the project is essential to its success. Ham, Main Street, CVB and the city are working together.

"We have everyone's cooperation, which is not something to take for granted," she said.