



maryland news

Mural in Greektown to add color, identity

Painting: The artwork has been commissioned by the city to celebrate Greek-American culture in Baltimore.

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Greektown resembles many other Baltimore neighborhoods - rows of houses with children playing on the sidewalks while adults look on from front stoops.

On several homes, the Greek flag hangs next to the American flag, a symbol of merging new and old cultures. Apart from the flags and the Acropolis Restaurant across the street, there isn't much to distinguish this section of Highlandtown at the end of Eastern Avenue from surrounding communities.

That's about to change.

On two walls facing the Metropolitan Church of God, a coat of light blue and white paint marks the beginning of a mural, which has been commissioned by the city to celebrate Greek-American culture in Baltimore.

The mural, at 503 Oldham St., will serve to stabilize and to identify the community, said lifetime Greektown resident Helen Johns, a board member at the Greektown Community Development Corp., which supports the neighborhood by organizing programs for residents. Johns also predicts that by taking steps to improve the area, it will bring more tourists to Greektown and to Baltimore.

"We're trying to clean it up so it will not only be an asset to those living here, but to the city," Johns said.

The Baltimore Mural Program integrated the ideas of members of the Greektown neighborhood, as well as those of 12 Greek-American artists from Baltimore, to create a design for the mural. The Greektown Community Development Corp. also participated.

"The community was very enthusiastic about the process," said Gary Kachadourian, visual arts coordinator for the **Baltimore Office of Promotion** and the Arts, which runs the mural program.

Greek artists Maria Cavacos, Xenofan Kohilas and Minas Konsolas, who will paint the mural, plan to illustrate what they feel is the essence of their culture. The mural will feature symbols of Greek culture, including dancers, a village and examples of architecture. Helping them will be local artist Shawn McRaney, who is painting the background.

"It's a center to identify us," Johns said. Work on the mural was scheduled to begin in November but was postponed because of concerns that cold weather would prevent the paint from adhering to the wall properly. It was restarted April 12 and will continue until mid-May.

When the mural is completed, it will cover two walls - one facing Oldham Street and the wall perpendicular to the street. The wall facing the street is about 54 feet wide and 26 feet tall, while the wall beside it stands approximately 89 feet wide and 9 feet tall. The mural, which is the effort of the **Baltimore Office of Promotions** and the Arts, received funding and support from the Baltimore Department of Housing and Community Development.

The Office of Promotions is planning more murals in city neighborhoods and has set up a muralists' registry, which will create a pool for the community to draw from when the next piece is commissioned.

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▶ **Shawn McRaney paints the early stages of a mural at 503 Oldham St. Three Greek artists also are participating and will illustrate the essence of their culture.**

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