

Diego Rivera murals

Basking in the afterglow of a successful protest

By LORAIN McCLISH

Mary White is still aglow with the pride that followed a successful campaign to keep the Detroit Institute of Art's Diego Rivera Court intact.

Speaking from her office in Oakland Community College (OCC) Orchard Ridge Campus, Mrs. White said, "So many times we put our name to a petition, or write a letter and that's the end of it.

"I want those people to know that every letter was read and every signature counted. Without that support we would never have made it."

The we of which she speaks is the 10-member Citizens Concerned for the Rivera Murals Committee, formed in haste and disbanded in about a month's time.

The concern at hand in the self-explanatory title was the destruction of the court's tranquility and perhaps damage to the murals that at least 3,000 Michigan residents thought inevitable if architectural plans proposed and approved by the institute's board of commissioners were carried through.

Those plans, which were but one small part of a massive renovation

scheduled for the institute, would have placed a stairway to the lower level of the institute in the middle of the Rivera Court.

MRS. WHITE, who is director of Woman's Center at OCC, joined the ad hoc committee, "because I grew up with those murals," she said. "Visits to Detroit (from her childhood home in Ypsilanti) and the art institute were a big part of my life."

The committee, all volunteers and led by Richard Axom, a professor of art history at University of Michigan, staged a two-pronged campaign for public support. One prong was aimed at the press, the other aimed at getting signatures on petitions.

The response from the letters received, Mrs. White believes, reflected pretty much her own feelings on the Rivera Court.

She quotes from a few: "I was an art student at Cass Tech at the time Diego was painting his murals. I often went there to watch. I took my books and studied, sometimes."

"The Diego Rivera murals have a special significance for workers. Any person who has ever worked on or seen an assembly line in operation will appreciate this significance."

"Our favorite place is to stand right in the center of the room to try and take in all of Rivera's great work."

"The murals are an important part of my 50-year-old memory of a day when a tremulous appetite for beauty was quickened in a gawky farm girl."

"Every time I look at them I see something new."

THE MEXICAN artist suffered bombasts from governments, churches, capitalists and workers during his lifetime for depicting subject matters considered controversial, from whatever side one happened to be sitting on.

"So this pro-Rivera response was particularly pleasing to us from that angle, on one hand," Mrs. White said.

"On the other hand it was pleasing because Detroit's Institute of Arts was proved again to be a people's museum."

"It is not an inaccessible castle in the sky. It is not elitist."

"The people gathered their forces and the people won out. Some of the letters we received were written in pencil on notepaper, others came with executive letterheads. But all of them conveyed the feeling that those murals in that court were their murals," she said.



Mary White, one of the first to jump on the save-the-Diego-Rivera-court bandwagon, talks about Michigan residents who spoke out in protest, and made a difference. (Staff photo by Randy Borst)



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FAAC wants newspapers for Feb. 27-Mar. 2 drive

By LORAIN McCLISH

Farmington Area Advisory Council (FAAC) gets a boost from Helping Hands this week as volunteers from the two groups launch a fund-raising newspaper drive.

"We've actually already started by trying to beat the trashmen on pick-up days," said Steve Tretinek, president of FAAC who is spearheading the drive with Bud LeBlanc from Helping Hands.

Residents are asked to help by placing their old newspapers in a marked trailer on the FAAC building grounds, 23450 Middlebelt Rd. starting Wednesday and continuing through Sunday, March 2.

Businesses or residents who have accumulated newspapers in an amount that would be unwieldy for them to handle may arrange for a pick-up by calling Tretinek at 474-3533, or LeBlanc at 478-3185.

IT IS UNUSUAL that a member of FAAC's executive board is worrying about a fund-raiser and is this probably the first time that has ever happened.

The agency, a counseling and advisory service for youth and their families, are supported by money from the state, county, both cities and donations from various service clubs.

But donations were down this year. "It's as simple as that," Tretinek said.

He went on to explain that though the austerity budget was able to slash in one direction or another the format and philosophy of services rendered were not to be disturbed.

"We carry about 200 cases on our rosters at any one given time," Tretinek said. "We do not believe that anyone who needs help belongs on a waiting list. We are still keeping our full time counselors busy."

FAAC's philosophy is, roughly, that if one child in the family is having a problem, the whole family is having a problem. Consequently 200 cases might involve up to four or five times that many people.

VOLUNTEERING with fund raisers, or otherwise giving help where help is needed, is not unusual for Helping Hands.

"We're a very small group of very active community-minded people," is the way LeBlanc described Helping Hands.

CB radios brought the group together originally. Since its formation, Helping Hands form holiday road patrols regularly in cooperation with Farmington and Farmington Hills Police Departments, and assist with traffic control during large events in both cities.

"We got involved with the Jaycees at one of their walk-a-thons," LeBlanc said. "and we've helped them since on several of their projects."

Tretinek is a Jaycee who was appointmented to the FAAC board in 1976, "and has been there ever since," he said.

Manpower for the FAAC paper drive will come from the Farmington Area Jaycees as well as Helping Hands.

JACK DAVIS, a former Jaycee president, represents the Jaycees in the newspaper drive, and has been "bugging waitresses" where he eats regularly to accumulate their restaurant's old papers for a pick-up.

"We would particularly like to hear from subdivision associations," Davis said. "What would be ideal is if they would designate one spot for the residents to place their papers for us to pick up at a specific time."

"We (the Jaycees) cleaned the town out of cans and bottles for the Farmington Community Center drive last month. Now we want to clean them out of newspapers."

A youth group at St. Gerard Catholic Church is the first to offer manpower for pick up during the drive, "and we could use a few more like that," Davis said.

"We will not be going door to door," Tretinek added. "With the cost of gas we'd be defeating ourselves. Hopefully those who call will have a substantial amount of paper for us to make it worth our while."

The three who are spearheading the drive ask residents not to bring old catalogs, telephone books or magazines to the collection site.



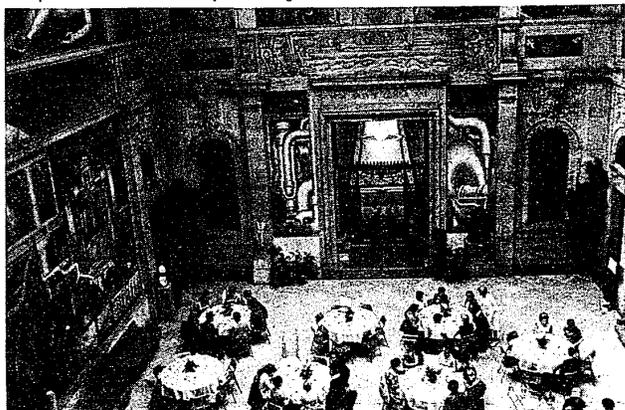
STEVE TRETINEK



BUD LeBLANC



JACK DAVIS



The Rivera Court in Detroit Institute of Arts has been the setting for many museum luncheons, dinners and receptions. But for the Michigan residents who stopped the construction of a stairway in the court, it is a setting for quiet reflection.



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