

# Splashes of paint bring outside in

By Kathy Parrah  
staff writer

**J**OHN FEIGHT'S art used to be just his. The Atlanta artist would labor for months on a seascape before carefully signing his name and reluctantly letting it go. Now his signature is just one of several scrawled along the bottom of a wall mural. But that's the only way he can really make his art "human."

"I don't care anymore about the painting being mine," explained Feight, whose hobby is brightening hospital walls. "It's more important that it be there."

**I**N A WEEKEND, Feight produced 20 murals to decorate the walls — and some ceilings — of Clinton Valley Center, Pontiac.

The state psychiatric hospital is the 53rd institution he has spruced up with the aid of volunteers, staff and patients. Some 1,500 of his landscapes bring the "outside in" to hospitals around this country and in Europe.

Ranging from seascapes to jungle scenes, his work graces Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, New York; M.D. Anderson, Houston, Texas; St. Mary's, San Francisco; the Clinique de Chevreuse, Paris; and Harper-Grace Hospital, Detroit. Northdale Hospital in Atlanta has 700 Feight murals.

"Hospitals are not just medical, but mental," said the artist, who has met some opposition from institutions that prefer plain white walls.

"I feel like I'm really breaking down barriers. One thing that keeps me going is that the barriers need to come down."

**S**OME SMALL hospitals are concerned that the artwork will be damaged.

"But it's better that they be there and be scratched than not be there at all," said Feight.

Clinton Valley, where some of the walls are 105 years old, bought Feight's artwork for just the artist's expenses and a small honorarium donated by hospital supporters.

"This makes a more pleasurable environment for patients and employees alike. And their participation gives them a little something special," said director Tony Drabik.

**A**N OHIO NATIVE, Feight, now 43, is married. His wife and two children also are artists. Feight has a degree in advertising from the University of Florida. He was an advertising account executive in New York City when he decided to try painting.

"I was frustrated and didn't have anything that was mine," said Feight.

He "fumbled his way through" a painting of Jesus, Mary and Joseph copied from a greeting card. Feight progressed to seascapes and landscapes,

which he sold for materials only. Now his works bring in \$800-\$1,200 each.

After an exhibit in Paris eight years ago, Feight decided to come back home and "do something of value." The grandson of a country doctor who gave away medicine to patients who couldn't pay, he headed for the nearest hospital.

"For years, I'd been telling people to volunteer in a hospital if they wanted to do something of value. But I never took my own advice."

**W**HILE TEACHING mental patients how to paint, Feight and his students turned a blank wall into a Georgia sunrise through the pine trees.

One mural led to another and another. Now he paints 30 to 40 a month on an ability-to-pay basis. Some hospitals are able to pay him, while others handle expenses or materials.

Feight's fulltime job as manager of public affairs for Scientific Atlanta, which produces electronic equipment for the cable TV industry, enables him to carry out his work.

But his dream is to "paint for nothing around the world" with the help of a corporation that sees value in his mission.

"That would be the key for me to go anywhere without any limits. I want to do more. I believe hospitals need art and art can be human."

**T**O ACCOMPLISH as much as possible in the time he has, Feight covers a lot of space quickly. His murals are scenes, but without much detail.

"The more I paint, the less I paint. I eliminate a lot." Feight uses sponges and paint rollers for extra mileage.

Because he works with inexperienced crews — mostly hospital volunteers with no experience except painting walls — he has had to relax some of his standards.

Dressed in green hospital scrubs covered with paint splashes, Feight outlines some of the projects. On others he just gives pointers on how to achieve cat tails or leaves. ("Grass is wonderful. It covers up a lot of sins.")

**H**E GIVES his students the idea and lets them go from there.

"Carl, this is a giraffe," Feight told one volunteer, while instructing another to swish a green roller "from here to there."

"What I don't do is give them a big course in art. I get them going right away so there is no time to think."

For first-time artists like Dottie Eicker, it's a thrill to see the murals take shape.

"One thing just leads to another," said the Birmingham resident. "All of a sudden you have something."



Instead of taking the weekend off, Clinton Valley Center volunteer Dottie Eicker of Birmingham (left) and hospital secretary Sylvia Hepler of Pontiac returned to paint wall murals.



With brushes, rollers and sponges, Atlanta artist John Feight turns sterile hospital walls into outdoor scenes.



A tree blooms inside the hospital because of the efforts of volunteer Patricia Drabik.

Photos by Rick Smith

## memory lane

Memories, memories . . . have we got the memories. And we'd like to share them with you. Using local newspaper files, we're dishing up generous slices of life in the Farmington area from 40, 30, 20 and 10 years ago.

NOV. 25, 1943

**A** CARTOON showed a turkey complete with spread tailfeathers. A sign saying "Reserved for our armed forces" hung from the turkey's neck.

**"OUR NOMINATION** for the luckiest individual we know would be Mrs. Stan Coon," noted an item in the Around the Block column. "While the rest of our fair city is furrowing its brow to determine where its Thanksgiving dinner is coming from, Mrs. Coon can settle back and smile contentedly for she won two fine turkeys at the American Legion party on Saturday night."

**SHORT ITEM:** "So far as potatoes are concerned, it is far better from the standpoint of nutritive value, as well as flavor, to cook them in their jackets and peel them after cooking." Another short: "Ground barley is practically equal to ground corn in feeding value for dairy cows and may be substituted for it pound for pound in the feeding mixture. Barley should be ground to medium firmness or crushed before it is fed."

**CLASSIFIED AD:** "FOR RENT — Room, suitable for a lady, 22816 Maple. Tel. 196. Another classified: "FOR SALE — Pigs, 20306 Hubbard."

NOV. 26, 1953

**CITY OFFICIALS** announced that Joseph Ferry, a Detroit subdivision developer, has purchased 13 acres of land in southeast Farmington from a local Realtor to build homesites. The property is located north of Alta Loma Street between Gill Road and Cass Avenue. The property will be developed next spring.

**POSTMASTER HENRY Tromblay** predicted that the volume of Christmas holiday mail at the Farmington Post Office will exceed the all-time record set last year.

**AN EDITORIAL** warned, "Don't spoil your holiday with a tragic auto accident. You've heard this statement before and you will probably hear it again. It is being repeated in the hopes that maybe one of you will read it and remember."

**AN ADVERTISEMENT** for Earl Vivier Oldsmobile, 333205 Grand River in Farmington, said, "42,889 . . . and over to Olds you'll go." The ad offered a "free, fascinating 48-page booklet on how to watch football by 13 top coaches."

**WEST FARMINGTON,** a column written by Mrs. Irwin Kapp, said, "Mark Bacheior fractured his wrist while starting a corn picking elevator."

**RETURNING LETTERMEN** on the Clarence-

ville High School basketball team included Mel Koch, Pat Killen, Jim Merians, Tom Rutlla and Jim Galloway.

NOV. 28, 1963 —

**THE FARMINGTON Township Board** canceled its regularly scheduled meeting for Nov. 25 in deference to memorial services being conducted for the late President John F. Kennedy. Township Clerk Floyd Cairns said the board would meet in special session at 10 a.m. on Nov. 30, a Saturday.

**SHORT ITEM:** "A man's first care should be to avoid the reproaches of his own heart."

**SANTA CLAUS** will make his first appearance in Farmington at 1:30 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 29, at the Farmington Plaza Shopping Center. Santa will be coming by helicopter under sponsorship of the business establishments of the plaza.

**FARMINGTON POLICE** arrested a 17-year-old Ulca, Mich., youth Nov. 20 when they found him inside Mack's Mobil Station, 33330 Eight Mile Road at 2:35 a.m. Police said the door had been kicked open.

NOV. 28, 1973

**A CHRISTMAS tree** darkening ceremony on Dec. 4 will replace the traditional tree lighting ceremony at the Farmington City Hall as a symbol of the effect of President Richard M. Nixon's recently announced energy limitations.

The Farmington City Council already has agreed to lower the heat in the municipal building, limit the Christmas decorations and attempt to conserve gasoline in city vehicles. The tree will be trimmed as usual, but no electric lights will be added.

**A RESOLUTION** urging Farmington Hills homeowners to conserve energy by eliminating holiday decorations using electric lights was passed by the city council, 4-1. The dissenting vote was cast by William Ortman, who said there were "no facts" to support the amount of energy which would be saved by the measure.

**CLARENCEVILLE HIGH School** bandmen are selling Texas Oranges and grapefruit to raise funds for band needs. A small order of 40 to 50 oranges costs \$3.75.

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