

Downtown Murals

Story by Diana Graham Photos by Linda Solomon and Nick Stiles

Several unique murals beautify downtown Rio Vista. They are a testament to the many creative local hard-working artists who are generous with their talent and support.

“Big Fish” - 84 Main St

The “Big Fish” mural is rumored to have been painted as a result of Humphrey’s visit to Rio Vista from October 10 to November 4 in 1985.

Known as Humphrey the Humpback Whale, a young 40 foot whale was an unusual site in the San Francisco Bay. It was unheard of within the Sacramento Delta. People came from all around to see this phenomenon.

1985 was Humphrey’s first trip to Rio Vista. He left his pod (family) as they were migrating from Alaska’s icy cold water to the southern warmer ocean’s warmer water. Humphrey made a turn at the Golden Gate and swam on by himself.

It’s not certain why Humphrey made the turn. After several days, scientists, people on shore and the boats along the waterway encouraged Humphrey to rejoin his pod.

Humphrey again returned in 1990. How did they know it was Humphrey? Whale tail flukes have unique markings allowing identification of each individual whale. Rescued again and sent on his way, Humphrey was last seen in 1991 near the Farallon Islands, outside the San Francisco Bay.

Nick Stiles painted the signs on Hap’s Bait Shop. Linda Solomon and Richard Laswell recently refreshed the mural. There is a big painting in the Chamber office, attributed to “Fishback,” that appears to be the original basis for the mural. If you know the name of the original creator of the mural, please let us know.

Old Saloon & Barbershop - Main & 2nd St

In 2014 Hale and Sue Conklin, owners of Books Rio V, requested a mural on their outside wall. RioVision, a nonprofit group dedicated to improving Rio Vista, raised the funds for the mural. Additional funding came from donations by those walking by, including some from young children.

While working and laughing together, artists completed this unique artwork in three months. The volunteers met in the morning to avoid the afternoon sun and sporadic Rio Vista winds.

Linda Solomon and Amy Schmidt shared their delight with this mural along with the challenges that accompanied the creation of this masterpiece. There were 20 artists and helpers that worked on the initial grid lines, setup, painting and cleanup. An interesting combination of techniques was used. Linda Solomon painted the saloon scene that was displayed on a table for the team to review as they measured and drew the grid lines on the wall. There were ongoing sketches and some changes from the original painting, including the rustic touch of the spittoon at the end of the bar on the floor. The romance within the mural was inserted to give the saloon a PG feel, including the possibility of a love story between a lady and gentleman who, upon hearing the piano playing, stop in for a dance, maybe the “polite waltz” popular in the west during the 1800’s.

Chris and Joan Quan’s sweet dog Sly (now deceased) is featured in the painting. What we don’t see in the mural: Sly had only three legs. The piano player and bartender displayed

were selected from pictures and drawings found from the era depicted in the saloon.

The challenge of ensuring the proportional perspective of the people was met by Linda and Amy taking pictures of the people to a local printer who enlarged the photos to the

3 foot by 5 foot size required within the painting. They held the outline of the enlarged photo up to the wall, dusted chalk around the photo and voilà, they then painted within the chalk lines. Brilliant!

The outline of the saloon mural creates the jaw-dropping illusion of an insert into the wall, including a whimsical woman from the present gazing in and taking a photo.

Amy Schmidt mastered the barbershop on the right side of the saloon. Its clarity and three-dimensional look and feel make you want to turn the door knob and walk right in.

This work of art reveals an amazing vision and tells a story of this region’s heritage, captured by a team of talented volunteer artists.



The “Big Fish” mural at Hap’s Bait, 84 Main Street.



Artists work on the Old Saloon & Barbershop mural at Books Rio V, corner of Main & 2nd Street.

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Pride of Rio Vista - 26 North 2nd St

Ryan Pace, former Rio Vista High School art teacher, was approached by a downtown building owner with a vision for a mural on the side of his building. The mural's vision included the unique amenities in Rio Vista, highlighting the impressive drawbridge, and including the flower shop, fishing, farming, the herds and flocks as well as the green source of power from the numerous wind turbines.

Nick Stiles, a local artist, attended school in Rio Vista from middle school through his first year in college. At the age of 20, Nick was recommended to design and paint the mural by his former art teacher, Ryan Pace.

A student wrote about Mr. Pace's impact on Yelp, "Mr. Pace was an influence to me that I didn't understand until I grew up as an artist. He seeks out potential and pushes it to the max... I've watched Pace push people with true talent... Art in high school can be something that can be considered an "easy A," Pace understands this and focuses on students that really have a passion for the arts. I will forever remember my studentship under a great teacher."

Nick, commissioned by the owner of the building, was excited to accept the challenge of the 8.5 foot by 40 foot mural.

The young but gifted artist began his first mural. He was tasked to capture the special character of Rio Vista. Nick sketched the mural on paper before he began the painting, using blue tape as the frame. Wearing a sombrero, Nick began the character outlines on the wall and proceeded to paint "all day." Nick has revealed some of the treasures of our unique community, capturing Rio Vista's numerous farms, cows and sheep and iconic drawbridge and, of course, the flowers.

The building owner paid for the materials and Julie Oakes, a florist at that time, also helped Nick with creative ideas. Nick used only five colors: black, white, yellow, green and blue, completing this artwork in just ten days.

Artist Nick Stiles' wonderful first mural emphasizes Rio Vista's unique character and reveals his amazing creative talent, adding to Rio Vista's vibrant downtown.



Mural by Nick Stiles at 26 North 2nd Street.

911 Memorial - 350 Main St (front)

Allen Hartford, Rio Vista Fire Chief at the time, commissioned the team of Linda Solomon, Amy Schmidt and Richard Laswell

to create a memorial mural for the front of the Rio Vista Fire Station. The three worked diligently to meet the deadline in ten days, in time for the fifteenth anniversary of the tragedy on September 11, 2001 and recognize the New York Fire Department's courageous efforts.

The first step was to pour the concrete pad in front of the mural. Then the artists started working around the mounted portion of the red, rusty steel I-beam – 4 feet long, 16 inches wide, weighing

780 pounds – from the ruins of the Twin Towers. The I-beam is one of about 250 pieces from the World Trade Center towers kept just for the purpose of memorializing that fateful day in September, 2001.

Former Rio Vista Fire Chief Tom Myers remembers the application process: it wasn't difficult but there were a few rules. The I-beam had to be visible to the public. The piece could not be used for fundraising nor could it be placed in a private collection. The City of Rio Vista was not charged for the piece but had to pay for the shipping from New York to California. A local shipping company agreed to transport the piece. When the transportation company learned what they were carrying, they transported it at no charge. The shipment came to Rio Vista through Suisun City on Hwy 12, followed by a convoy of vehicles with sirens blaring. The beam arrived for all to see – this memorable piece of history.

Tom Myers said, "We wanted everyone to know we were transporting something significant to share." On arrival, they discovered the size was not exactly as expected. What would they

do with this I-beam to display it in the best way possible?

Paul Graham Drilling was asked to take a look at the beam and it was decided to place it in front of the fire station with a large post attached to the back of the beam. A plaque is mounted that commemorates the day of dedication at the fire station and places a piece of history in the community of Rio Vista – history that touched everyone in America.



Artist Amy Schmidt works on the 911 Memorial mural on the front of the Rio Vista Fire Department at 350 Main Street.

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Historic RVFD - 350 Main St (side)

Tom Myers, RV's Fire Chief in 2013, admired artist Nick Stiles work on the flower shop. He contacted Nick to paint a mural on the side of the Rio Vista Fire House, 16' tall by 60' long, based on a historic photograph taken when the Fire House opened in the 1920s. Nick used the photo to estimate the price to complete the mural. Tom asked Nick, who was 21 at the time, to present his estimate of time and cost for the mural.



Artist Nick Stiles works on the Historic RVFD mural on the side of the Rio Vista Fire Department at 350 Main Street.

Nick created a PowerPoint presentation to submit the estimate to the Rio Vista Foundation, Rio Vista Rotary Club and other community service organizations. This mural was to be created using just seven colors: black, white, tan, green, blue, red and grey. Once approved, Nick started with the picture in Photoshop adding a grid. He then used the cinder blocks on the 16' by 60' wall to begin his sketch. He used sections of the wall cinder blocks to set the specific scenes. Nick would first paint an area the primary color of the scene and then draw the contents of the scene in the area before carefully painting the final details.

Nick mentioned that Clinton Scholting provided the scissor lift. You will see the picture of Nick on the lift while painting. Imagine standing on a scissor lift in the heat and our Rio Vista wind... Wow! Nick said that matching the fire engine red was the most difficult task. His father's input while viewing the work in progress prompted further testing of a few different shades of red.

The estimate for completion was three to four weeks when actual completion turned out to be five weeks. Impressive considering the details of 17 portraits inserted into the mural. The portraits are of the actual first Rio Vista Fire Department 93 years ago. There are some relatives of these men currently living in Rio Vista.

Tom, the fire chief, had to leave town for a few weeks while Nick worked on the mural. When he returned to Rio Vista, he was delighted. Tom contacted a reporter at Fox News in Sacramento who came to Rio Vista to see the mural, interview Nick and photograph this classic mural.

Nick is now 26 and a successful artist discovered right here in Rio Vista. He is painting as commissioned in homes in So. Cal. He still has family residing in Rio Vista. You may contact Nick for individual commissioned painting. His website is <http://NickStilesArt.com>.