

# Don't be stubborn! Sponsor a mule!

Have you been seeing mules?

The outside major public art project is well under way, and the long-anticipated, hand-painted, life-size fiberglass mules are appearing in front of buildings, on sidewalks and sometimes indoors.

Their presence is being noted from Bristol, Pa., to Scranton, Pa. — 165 miles of mules.

The white prototypes, some sitting and most standing, have been distributed to the artists commissioned to paint them. Once decorated, they are placed in locations of the sponsors' discretion for the public to admire.

Because the Delaware and Lehigh Canal Corridor is so long, three nonprofit organizations have been appointed to distribute the prototypes and then place the finished mules in their "corrals" — the Michener Art Museum in Doylestown is in charge of the towns along the Delaware Canal, Doylestown and Quakertown, Pa.. Michener is also overseeing the New Jersey towns on the other side of the Delaware River.

The Banana Factory in Bethlehem (the visual component of the Bethlehem "Musikfest") oversees the mule placement in the Lehigh Valley. The Luzerne Cultural Council in Luzerne County covers

the northern end of the display area. The entire program is being run by the nonprofit branch of the Delaware and Lehigh National and State Heritage Corridor Commission.

Many of the finished mules are on display at the above locations.

Soon two more mules will appear in Frenchtown. As of this writing they are in their prototype condition, or as some of the volunteers refer to them, they are "nude." They are standing behind the Alchemy clothing shop, at 17 Bridge St., which is owned by artist Barry Sharplin and his wife, Cleo.

Barry Sharplin, the artist who has been commissioned to paint the mules, has his studio in the basement of the building, where he also conducts art classes. He tells me that even in their unfinished state the mules have been attracting attention.

One of the mules will be painted with designs created by Kipp Sujet, some of which he drew when he was in the hospital undergoing a bone marrow transplant for leukemia. Kipp was born on Aug. 11, 1976, and died on Feb. 10, 1995.

After Kipp's death, his parents founded the Kipp Sujet Memorial Scholarship Fund. The fund is the

Betty  
Orlemann

Columnist



sponsor of Kipp's Mule.

Kipp lived his entire life in Judland, Hunterdon County. He and his brother, Dylan, learned how to ride their bikes on the canal towpath and to canoe in the river. His parents both grew up in Hunterdon County.

Tragically, his mother died of cancer in 2001.

Artist Barry Sharplin was born and raised in New Zealand, where he went to the Ilam School of Art in Christ Church. He is the father of two grown sons. He met his wife, Cleo, in New Zealand where she spent 10 years. She is originally from Texas.

Of his work he says: "My whole life has been devoted to art. I have an eclectic approach and am not stuck with any particular medium."

I can tell you that his work is gorgeous! I can't wait to see his mules.

In addition to "Kipp's Mule," Barry is also commissioned to paint a mule for the Frenchtown Business and Professional Associ-

ation. He told me that it will be painted as a "River Mule," which is what it will be named. When it is finished, it will look as if it is made of water, he said.

It is presently planned that "River Mule" will be placed outside the Hudson United Bank at the corner of Bridge and Harrison streets. "Kipp's Mule" will be placed on Bridge Street next to the walking path.

When "Kipp's Mule" is displayed, be sure to look for his little stick characters holding pipes. He named the design, "Pipe Dream." Originally Kipp drew it with smoke coming from the pipes, but Barry Sharplin changed it to bubbles to be politically correct!

Sharplin has lined up other artists to help him paint the mules. Included are Cleo, Hardy Aubritlon, Rosanne Hepburn, Roberto Padovano, Pat Burns and "maybe others," he said.

As of this writing there are at least 160 mules, which will be auctioned off in the fall.

Barry Sharplin praised the summer-long event: "It's so wonderful to have a project that supports the arts and the community. It's an incredible life enhancing experience. It's multi-faceted. So many interests have gone into painting the mules. It's got so many people together."

*Betty Orlemann lives in Tinicum Township. Her column appears every other week.*