

Public education among program's benefits

ART

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Alves and Andrew Reid are creating large murals and tiled seating, including a pineapple-shaped bench, for the courthouse exterior.

Noted Vermont artist Michael Singer has built an artistic structure that doubles as a security barrier at the main courthouse in downtown West Palm Beach. Other projects in discussion include a Black Heritage Trail and a Lake Okeechobee Community Arts Trail.

Formerly run by a county Cultural Council, the public art program now is part of the Facilities Development and Operations Department, where Singer works with county planners, facilities managers and employees who work in the buildings where art will be placed.

In the future, the county may consider a law requiring a percentage of all county capital-improvement, expansion and renovation spending to be dedicated to public art, Singer said. In the meantime, administrators are hoping county planners will see building opportunities as oppor-

tunities for public art.

The County Commission appointed people with arts backgrounds to a committee that selects artists for public projects.

"With public art we really have an opportunity in this county to make public places more interesting and inviting," said County Commissioner Mary McCarty, who heads the committee. "Public art will show the community the artistic talent we have here."

An ongoing public art show takes place along the main concourse of Palm Beach International Airport and features a new exhibit by local artists every four months. More than 300,000 visitors pass by, public art officials said.

"I know when I get off a plane I look forward to seeing art, instead of just plain walls," said Mary Anne Frye, an artist from West Palm Beach who has seen the airport shows.

The current exhibit, "Bright Sights, Electrifying Nights," showcases seven Palm Beach County artists who explore scenes and sounds of South Florida through photography, painting and poetry.

"I'm hoping a lot of people see

my work and I can sell them or at least get people to visit my studio," said Judith Rodman Flescher of Palm Beach Gardens, whose vibrant palm tree paintings bordered with collage are on display.

Some artists say they aren't the only ones who benefit from public art.

"I think it's a great way to educate the public about the arts," said Maria Richards, an artist from West Palm Beach. "The more they notice it, the more they will appreciate it."

The county has taken a substantial step toward a serious public arts program, but it's still too early to tell whether the program will have legs, county leaders said.

"There are so many needs in this county, and public art is seen as a wonderful amenity," McCarty said. "I think each commissioner is going to have to see it in their own districts to see the contribution it's making before they decide if they're going to support it."

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FACE OF PUBLIC ART: Carlos Alves of Miami is among several artists participating in Palm Beach County's Art in Public Places program. "Public art enhances the beauty of an environment, making it functional and pleasing to look at all at the same time," said Elayna Toby Singer, who directs the county program. Artists say both they and the public will see benefits. Staff photo/Judy Sloan Reich