

# Walldogs return home to where it all began

by Jen Reed

When wondering where it all began with the Walldogs, you must step back in time even before the first Walldog event that took place in Allerton in 1993. It began after Bill Knapp tore down a building in Allerton in 1985. With the building coming down, an exposed brick wall remained.

"It was Missy Niday that said we needed a mural there," began Nancy Bennett. "I got my sign painter friends together and we consulted with Teresa Wampler and we painted the Round Barn mural in 1985."

After a few years passed in 1993, the Inn of the Six-Toed Cat owner Bob Finley commissioned Bennett to do a piece for a door.

"At the time Bob had a radio show called Live from the Inn and he invited me to be on the show to talk about this commission piece," Bennett continued. "While live on the show he then put me on the spot saying the one mural was needing touched up and asked if I could bring my sign painter friends back to town again."

In the meantime, other ideas for additional murals began to be discussed for the town of Allerton and that is when Bennett began thinking about the Inn and how to make it happen. With the Inn having eight rooms available, eight designers made their way to Allerton in 1993 to complete eight murals.

"Artists from all across the U.S. and Canada were invited using the sign painter's mailing list called The

Letterheads to send out invitations," said Bennett. "Approximately 65 artists showed up from all over the U.S. and Canada to complete the eight signs around Allerton in one weekend."

With out lodging available for all the artists at the time, the community adopted artists to house them as Wampler fed the artists. This event was a success with the community paying for the expenses for all supplies and equipment.

"It was a roaring success," stated Bennett. "We knew we were going to make some nice artwork but we didn't know that the interactions between the community and artists would be so cool that the artists would want to go back and replicate that same event in other communities."

Depending on where events would take place, the theme spread and artists were soon traveling to events when able to join in and work on other murals together.

"Every artist does not get paid money for an event like this," Bennett said. "Every artist that showed up to paint got food and lodging. Now, designers get paid, coordinators get paid and it became a movement then."

The Walldogs are not an organization per say. There are no dues. No titles like president, vice president or treasurer. The rules are simple. If you show up at an event to paint, you're then a Walldog.

"That's really how it started and 30 years later

it's gone worldwide," said Bennett. "There are Walldog events in Australia where in the East side of Australia they are called Wallnuts and on the west side called Walldogs. It's just evolved and grown."

With the Walldog movement growing, Bennett herself has found herself fortunate to paint in different countries to see various other parts of the world. Along with the group and movement, she's built lasting relationships with the artists as well.

"When I first sent out those invitations 30 years ago, I didn't necessarily know most of the artists that came for the first event in Allerton but now I know a lot of them and every time we have an event I see old friends and make new friends as well."

The recent Walldog Festival saw roughly 200 artists registered from five different countries and 26 U.S. states that were ready to take on the task in Wayne County where 16 murals would be painted over the course of a few days. While the number of murals may seem like a lot, Bennett noted that is a rough average that is completed for big events such as this. Something that did separate this event from others however, was the manner in which the murals were painted.

"The artists love the romance of painting on walls with the texture and it's kind of our roots but the Walldogs for this event were really excited to be close to the other artists to see what they were doing and the progress they made and the fairgrounds was a wonderful space for this."

"Usually artists are spread all over a town or county and it's hard-

er to take a break at the same time," added Sara Wampler, member of the Wayne County Walldogs committee and a big proponent of the 2023 Walldog Festival.

Bennett noted that in other Walldog events the murals are most often painted apart directly on walls and this one was the most done on panels that would be placed after completion.

"It worked out really well and I saw a Facebook post that said it was a massive success and I don't know how it could get any better than that," said Bennett. "The artists did love Iowa and the rural part here and felt it was quite beautiful. They left me a complaint wall with the one complaint being that people here were too friendly."

"I've been involved in events on the corporate side from a past job and I think this is the only event where I didn't get a single complaint from the artists," added Wampler. "Usually when planning an event with volunteer groups you hear chatter about things that could have gone better but for the most part things went smoothly."

With each of the murals now being installed on their permanent fixtures across the county with much thanks to Jim Oskam, the hope is for those traveling through Wayne County to take part in the mural trail. Each mural is numbered with a QR code sign next to it where visitors can learn

more about the piece and history involved with the sign.

"Ultimately there will be a Wayne County Cultural Trail website where it doesn't only display the murals, but other notable areas of interest across the county we are fortunate to have here," Wampler added. "Short term we are already seeing people stopping to admire and view the murals. Long term, we

hope to bring people to the area as it's about loving what we have here."

"You have a lot to be proud of here. You have stories to tell and a lot of things that are firsts, or bests or things that made a difference. It helps to understand it and it's good for others to know about those things in your community too," Bennett said in closing.



Nancy Bennett takes a moment to check progress on the Gone With the Wind mural and chat with lead artist during the first full day of work at the Wayne County Fairgrounds.

**"Art speaks where words are unable to explain."**



The Welcome sign that stands on the northeast corner of the Corydon square welcoming those in Wayne County for the Walldog Festival.

**"First Home of the Walldogs"**  
Allerton, Iowa

**ALLERTON & WAYNE COUNTY** IOWA  
WHERE IT ALL BEGAN IN 1993

A huge thank you to those that helped make this event possible and to every artist that traveled from near and far. A simple **THANK YOU** will never be enough!  
**City of Allerton**

**Times REPUBLICAN** WAYNE COUNTY NEWSPAPERS

**2023 Walldogs  
Special Section Staff**

**Cover design & photography**  
Jen Reed

**Photography**  
Jenny Nickell &  
Jen Reed

**Editorial**  
Jen Reed

**Advertising**  
Jenny Nickell, Cheryl Thompson &  
Jen Reed

**Layout & ad building**  
Jen Reed

*Thank you to everyone that helped make this special section possible! We wanted to show our thanks and gratitude for those that made this possible in bringing vibrant art pieces into our communities!*

THANK YOU

The Wayne County Walldogs Mural Festival was a huge success, creating 16 murals for our local cities that will be installed in the coming weeks. We absolutely could not have accomplished this without a tremendous amount of support from local organizations, governments, and individuals.

**We would like to thank everyone involved in the festival, especially:**

- \* Our generous individual and business donors.
- \* The many host families and RV donors who housed 40 of our visiting artists.
- \* Hotel Rea, the Inn of the Six Toed Cat, the Nodyroc, the Loft House Barn Lodge, and many other lodges and hotels who provided places for artists to stay.
- \* The dozens of volunteers who put in hundreds of hours helping with registration, airport rides, artist supplies, providing entertainment and food for the welcome party, and setting up / cleaning up for the murals and the festival at the Wayne County Fairgrounds and at Knapp Park in Allerton.
- \* Everyone who loaned centerpieces, tables, easels, ladders, extension cords, buckets, and other supplies.
- \* The local organizations and churches who cooked or served 14 meals at the Fairgrounds. Feeding 200+ people for five days was a huge accomplishment! These groups include Allerton PEO, Brenda Beckner & Friends, Eden Garden Club, Corydon PEO, Methodist Men, Corydon Lions, Sue Darrah & Friends, Last Week Supper Group, Cornerstone Church, Clio Baptist Youth Group, New Zion Church, Corydon Rotary, Seymour Community Club, Allerton Presbyterian Church, and Corydon Sirf Twisters, as well as help from Allerton Garden Club and many others at Knapp Park in Allerton.
- \* Wayne County ISU Extension for hosting the "Wallpuppies" kids' murals.
- \* The Wayne County Fair Board for their support with the beautiful Fairgrounds facilities.
- \* The Wayne County Supervisors, Wayne County Development Corporation, and the cities of Allerton, Clio, Corydon, Humeston, Lineville, Millerton, Promise City, and Seymour for their financial and physical support.
- \* The building owners who graciously allowed us to install murals on their walls.
- \* Don Wagner Auction Company for donating their services to host our Walldogs Benefit Auction, and all of the bidders and buyers who participated in the event.
- \* The Walldogs artists from 29 states and 6 countries who traveled to Wayne County and volunteered their time and talent to bring 16 murals to life.

**This was an incredible weekend and the results of it will be felt in Wayne County for years to come. THANK YOU to everyone who was involved – we are very fortunate to live in a community that comes together and supports each other in such big ways.**

**With gratitude,**  
The Wayne County Walldogs Local Committee (Nancy Bennett, Bill and Joan Byrns, Brenda DeVore, Donna Donald, Brett Fetters, Stacy Gibbs, Denise Goben, Avis Goben, Wayne and Marilyn Jackson, Dorene McCart, Sara Wampler, Bonita Wells)