

# Australian artist brings his vision to life in Humeston's Saints mural

by Jen Reed

When given a challenge of a new art project such as a large mural painting, many would think the actual project painting itself may take the most time for completion. Often times however, that is not the case. For artist David Johnson of Mount Barker, Australia, coming up with the design for the City of Humeston's mural is where the most time was spent as over 200 hours went into researching and learning about Humeston, the Mormon Trail Saints and deciding what art piece would best depict a piece of history for this particular mural.

His passion for art began at an early age as he began working in sign shops as a painter at the age of 12.

"My stepdad was an Australian Speedway Hall of Famer and he obviously had a very big race team and I got to letter his cars early as a kid and it just evolved," Johnson noted. "I got an apprenticeship at 15 and then started my own business. I worked in the sign business for 10 or 11 years and then the digital age came about and everything became computer-related and that's not what I wanted to do."

Johnson stepped away from the painting business and entered a new world working in police departments and working in forensics.

"I just retired last year so I guess I am now back where it all began," stated Johnson.

Johnson joined the Walldogs in 2017 after his wife learned of the group the year prior. His first mural painting event with the Walldogs lead him across the country as he traveled to Illinois.

"We bought a book and in the book was two tickets to the U.S. so we got to travel and paint," said Johnson as he recalled his beginning with the group.

After becoming a member of the Walldogs, Johnson was able to partake in a couple events closer to home within Australia, one in his hometown in 2019 and another in November of 2022 where founding Walldog member Nancy

Bennett was invited to join the event in Australia.

"We tried to keep it going through COVID as well as it didn't affect us too much, but we were shutdown for a bit," said Johnson.

"Nancy first contacted me about five or six months ago and I began working on the design and over time it's evolved very differently from where I first began," Johnson began. "As I learned and read more about the school district I knew the school logo had to be on the mural. It was once one Saint then it became two to separate the Mormon Trail from the school Saints."

"We also had to add in the 1846 for the original settling here and if you look closely you see the original Humeston School in the background," Johnson continued.

When determining the sign design it went beyond just a depiction of what would best represent the Mormon Trail Saints.

"I also wanted to get a look at the building so I google earthed it so I could see what colors would best stand out on that building with it being a white background," Johnson added. "In our hometown we have 12 murals in it and the colors really brighten up the town and people talk about it all the time and I hoped by doing nice vibrant colors it would stand out beautifully on the face of their building."

Johnson's travels to Wayne County came by way of flying into Chicago where he and his wife were picked up by an original Walldog member Jay Allen. The Johnson's spent a couple days with Jay and his wife which allowed them time to make a three-dimensional coin piece that would be placed in the center bottom of the mural.

"We got to build this in his workshop as we couldn't bring it from Australia," said Johnson. "We also did a couple things for the auction then came from Rockford, Ill. to here."

Johnson was quite pleased with his trip to Wayne County, Iowa noting the weather couldn't

have been better especially compared to back home in Australia.

"It was brutal in Australia before we left to come here as it gets very hot, but I've served in other farming communities within the Wheat belt in Australia and here it is sort of similar," said Johnson when describing Iowa. "It's a little bit dryer and a little bit browner there as it's nice and green here in Iowa."

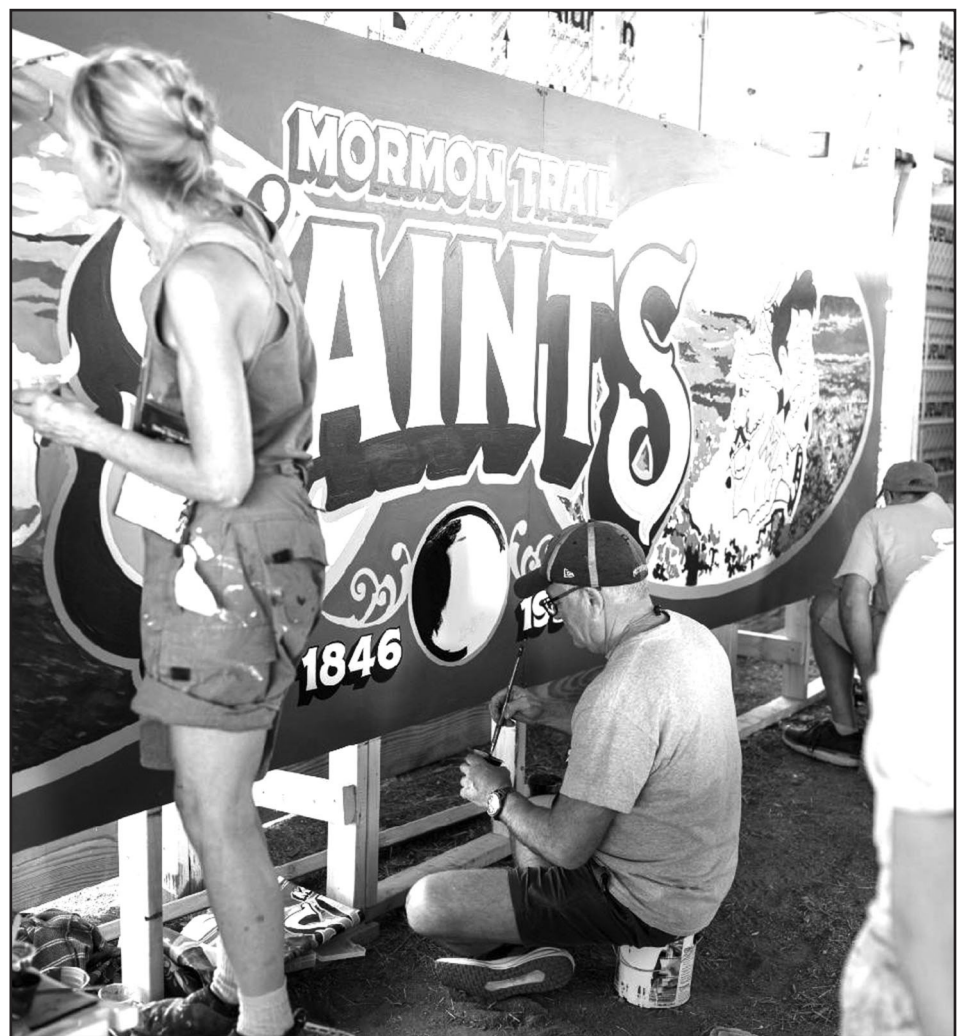
Johnson, along with his wife, were one of several Walldog artists that stayed at the Hotel Rea during their time in Wayne County.

"It is beautiful and that was one surprise as it's very nice and we have other Australian artists staying there as well so it's been fun to catch up with them also," Johnson noted.

"This has been fun and seeing an area that maybe tourists don't often hear about by seeing photos on glossy brochures . . . it's great that we got this opportunity to come here and visit this great community," Johnson said in closing. "It's been a fantastic few days!"

With the journey taking nearly 34 hours of travel time, Johnson planned to take advantage of extra time following the mural festival to visit other areas while here in Iowa.

**Pictured on right: The artists donated items that were placed up for auction on Saturday evening during the festival including the Saints piece from David Johnson. The proceeds from this auction will be used for maintaining upkeep on the mural displays across the county.**



The above photos show David Johnson hard at work along with other painters helping on the Mormon Trail Saints mural.



David Johnson takes a moment to pause for a smile in front of his mural design that was still a work in progress on this day. The banner hanging to the right shows the final design Johnson referenced for the mural piece.

*"Art is not what you see, but what you make others see."*

**THANK YOU!**  
 What an amazing event! Thank you to all involved that made this a success and thank you for including us!

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**Mormon Trail Chamber**

**THANK YOU!**  
 We appreciate all the hard work that went into making the Walldog event successful! Thank you for adding color to our communities!

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**THANK YOU!**

We are so very thankful for the great success from the recent Walldog event. Our town now proudly displays our beautiful works of art and we can't thank those involved enough!

**City of Corydon**