

# Wallpuppies turn into Walldogs and lead the way for the Jesse James mural

by Jen Reed

The first time Joe and Ben Diaz visited Wayne County was back in 1993 when they accompanied their parents, Bill and Janet, to the original Walldog painting days in Allerton. Even being just children at that time they were still able to join in the painting fun.

"I remember there being a garage door where each of the kids that were here were invited to paint a panel on this garage door," Joe recalled. "I'm sure it's not there now and has been painted over but that was fun for us to join in."

As the Diaz brothers remembered, one of them painted Ninja Turtles on a panel or two as the other attempted to recreate the Walldog logo. They were given the opportunity to freestyle paint and leave their mark in Allerton as their parents not only painted the murals that have been on display in Allerton, but with the large number of artists there working and space being limited, their father also spent time pin-striping fire trucks in the Allerton Fire Station.

Cut to 30 years later and now the Wallpuppies have joined the ranks with many of the original Walldog members and now are working as project leaders on the Jesse James mural that will hang in Corydon. Adding more excitement to the event is having Joe being the one that designed the Jesse James mural.

"I was super honored that we were asked to be project leaders because that first meet was all those years ago and to be asked to not only come back but lead this was really cool," began Joe. "We wanted to go above and beyond for this design."

Once given document information and reference photos to work from, Joe got to work on coming up with his design for the Jesse James mural.

"You have to piece it together like a puzzle and make sure everything you want to include has a spot and tells a story when you look at it," Joe continued.

"In this particular case, that was the actual building where the bank robbery took place and that needed to go into the design. Then adding in the photo of him at a younger age."

Joe also researched what art styles were popular during that era of time which is something he tends to do to make the style match the theme. He wasn't sure how much time went into the design but noted it isn't a quick process.

Mural painting isn't a year round event for the Diaz family as they own a sign shop, Diaz Sign Art in Pontiac, Ill. where they call home however, 2023 has been a busy year for them having painted murals in Florida, Michigan and Illinois along with the one for this event.

"I think it's really cool the movement has endured to this point," said Joe when giving his thoughts on the Walldog Festival. "Sure there's original members here, but there's so many new artists that have joined as well that were not at the first one and it's just so cool that it has endured through time to this point."

"For me it's really cool because my sons are here and they are now the same age as what Joe and I were the first time we came here," said Ben adding in. "And my one son is now painting over on the kid's murals so it really is a generational thing."

They appreciate what they have learned from original Walldog artists and have taken note to now help teach others that want to learn and join in as well. Ben spends his time focusing on straight line painting while Joe claims he isn't as good with a paintbrush in hand and tends to stick with the design process more often.

"I enjoy the design part of it and I think I'm pretty good at mixing paint but there's just a lot of really talented and skilled people here and when you watch them work I think man they are just so much faster and more accurate and it is really humbling," said Joe.

"We are all almost like a family so it's like a family reunion being here," said Ben. "Our mom is off shopping currently in a nearby town with her girlfriends that are also Walldog artists for a little break and it's fun for them to explore and this event is just a fun time for everyone."

While in Wayne County for the festival event, Ben, along with his wife Ashley and their sons stayed at the Wayne County Fairgrounds in a camper that was donated for use during the event.

"It's really nice that someone is letting us borrow the camper and so great how the community came together to help out for this event like that," said Ben.

Joe's family stayed behind in Pontiac for this event so he spent his evenings staying at the Hotel Rea in a suite and enjoyed the historic presence the hotel brings to Corydon.

All in all, the Diaz family have certainly left their mark on Wayne County as their art will hang for all to enjoy for many years to come.

"Part of the reason we were excited to come here for this event and especially to be project leaders is at the original event the artists that were here were the best of the best people, you know like industry names," began Ben. "We were very familiar with these names and for us to be included in that group now is really, really cool. Sure we've done other things through the years, but to be included in this group with people that are legendary is so amazing."

"As artists, we owe everything to our parents and them," Joe said in closing. "Hopefully they know that all of their hard work has paid off for the younger generation. And seeing people here that are younger than us following in those footsteps as the next generation is so cool too."

"The Walldogs are alive and well and I think they will continue for many years to come!"



Three generations of the Diaz family: Front row, left to right: Patrick, Bill, Janet and Will. Back row: Joe, Ben and Ashley.



The above photo shows the early progress of the Jesse James mural.



*"A blank canvas has unlimited possibilities."*

Whether concentrating on intricate work within a mural (pictured on left) or taking a moment to have conversation with fellow artists (shown below), the Walldog Festival is an event that won't soon be forgotten.



When visiting the Wayne County Fairgrounds to view progress on the murals, it wasn't uncommon to see tents set up for artists to camp in along with campers, R.V.'s, buses and some even stating they slept in their vehicles during the stay for the event.

*"You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have."*



**City of Lineville**  
Our new Walldog mural with the amazing display of red, white and blue stands proudly in our town now and we are so thankful for being included in this wonderful event.

**THANK YOU!**

ALLERTON & WAYNE COUNTY IOWA  
WHERE IT ALL BEGAN IN 1993

30 YEARS AND THOUSANDS OF WALLS

**THANK YOU!**

Thank you to everyone that helped make the Walldog event possible. We appreciate the beauty you brought to us!

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