

A Look Back at the Center Street Lemon Mural: An Interview with Artist Bob Teague



Third Avenue Village's lemon mural is the longest standing mural in the district and a Village icon. Depicting the sprawling lemon groves that occupied much of Chula Vista at the turn of the century, the mural was completed in 2003 by local artist Bob Teague. Bob, a long-time resident and current Manager of the Third Avenue Village Farmers' Market, paints a picture of what it took to capture the essence of Chula Vista through art.

Third Avenue Village Association (TAVA): How did the mural project and your involvement in it transpire?

Bob Teague (BT): In 2002 the Association was looking for a way to enliven Center Street and draw attention to the weekly Farmers' Market. As a local artist with a background in advertising, I was working closely with TAVA on marketing at the time. A mural was one of the ideas I threw out there that took flight. Because the mural property is owned by the Ferrentelli Family, who also own a building in Pacific Beach that has an iconic mural on it from the 1940s; we thought they would be open to a mural on their Chula Vista property.

TAVA: What was the inspiration for the mural?

BT: Chula Vista agriculture served as the starting point since Chula Vista is deeply rooted in agriculture and it tied in well with the Farmers' Market and the Lemon Festival, though it was designed to stand on its own as well. I used to drive down the coast from my hometown of Oxnard to San Diego for college and I would see these beautiful rolling hills as I came down. When conceptualizing the mural design, I imagined that much of Chula Vista may have looked the same way, with rolling hills and lemon orchards in the early 1900s. We also wanted a Chula Vista icon in the piece, so we included the historic Cordray home that is located on Davidson Street. This and several other elements in the mural help create depth.

TAVA: Tell us about the process of painting the mural. How many hours did the project take?

BT: Once we settled on the concept, I measured the building wall and broke the space into smaller squares that I stenciled onto the wall. Next, I created a smaller scale painting also broken into corresponding squares. Using this, I painted one square at a time on the mural. If you look closely, you may still see these faint square outlines on the wall. I liked keeping that part of the process slightly visible. I used a layering process of the paints, layering complimentary colors to create depth and vibrancy. The composition is designed to fool your eye into thinking you can actually step into the scene. The mural is 50x20 feet and took 300 hours to complete.

TAVA: What kind of response did you get while publicly working on the project and after its completion?

BT: The response throughout the project and in the years since its completion has been extremely rewarding. During my progress on the mural, several residents of Congregational Towers would cheer me on from their balconies. Aspiring artists observed and asked questions. The project was even the subject of a class field trip. I also worked on the mural during the hours of the Farmers Market which generated excitement from the public. Upon its completion, we saw many people interacting with the mural, taking pictures and becoming part of the scene, which was a major goal. It sparked several conversations on Chula Vista history and the community embraced the piece, assuming ownership right away. The public outcry when the mural was tagged in 2012 demonstrated that sense of community pride in the piece.

TAVA: What has the legacy of the mural been and what do you think the impact has been on the Chula Vista community?

BT: The mural seemed to cut a swath through all ages and social classes as well as shined a light on the artistic process and Chula Vista's history. It was memorialized in the Chula Vista Centennial book (published in 2011) and people continue to interact with it week over week, as I have seen working at the Farmers' Market. The mural design also inspired the Lemon Festival's logo and poster design.

For me personally, it has acted as a calling card. My work on the lemon mural eventually led to my work on another mural project on Center Street, the Congregational Church back wall beautification project done on Community Congregational Church and Preschool. I'd also like to think it inspired other building owners and artists to erect murals.

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Completed in 2003, the same year the iconic Third Avenue Archway was erected at Park Way, the Center Street Lemon Mural augmented the sense of place that the Village was striving for. In its 13 years, it has only suffered only one major graffiti tag, has acted as backdrop for hundreds, if not thousands of pictures, and has spurred countless conversations about Chula Vista, history and art.



The wall of 325 Third Avenue, facing Center Street in progress



Center Street Lemon Mural completed 2003