

Oak Ridge – The Secret’s Out! “Paint the Town - with Chalk”

(As published in The Oak Ridger’s Historically Speaking column the week of May 18, 2020)

Plans are being developed to turn the Wilson Street corridor between Tulane Avenue and Rutgers Road, near Main Street Oak Ridge, into a buzzing, active Downtown Oak Ridge. The Oak Ridge City Blueprint contains several references to this initiative. Public meetings have been held to define the specifics of the desired development. A private and public partnership is desired as the project moves ahead.

The first step in the plan was originally intended to be held on May 9, 2020, with the intent to fill that area with the largest example of Tactical Urbanism known to mankind! The plan was to literally, paint the three-block-long vision on the ground, engage the community in our virtual downtown and show developers an opportunity to create ‘Downtown Oak Ridge’.

The downtown concept is intended to include shopping and entertainment, offices and services, multi-story apartments and condominiums, and public gathering spaces, something this town really wants.

Covid-19 forced this effort to be reconsidered as bringing people into large crowds is not safe at this time. So, Co-Chairs Cathy and Bill Toth, and Rick Chin have directed an interim modified approach, to the “Paint the Town” initiative, set for Saturday, May 23, 2020, 9AM – 3PM. The full-blown “Paint the Town” event will be rescheduled for a later date.

Led by Jim Dodson, a team of regional artists will create a colorful, drive-by chalk walk that captures scenes of what this new downtown can be. In this case, our artists will create their scenes on panels that can be displayed either vertically or horizontally. This will also allow the community to enjoy them more than once.

Jim said, “A group of city leaders and volunteers were still anxious to keep the momentum going with a smaller event that would engage a team and our community in a creative way that would continue to share the vision of downtown opportunities in Oak Ridge in a safe manner.”

Jim continued, “So our committee decided to move forward and promote ‘**Paint the Town - with Chalk**’ a sidewalk chalk art exhibition along the south side of Wilson Street for 15 professional artists to exhibit their ideas and vision of a vibrant downtown in Oak Ridge. The drawings will mostly be completed at home on tempered hardboard with artists soft pastels and then brought to the site on the morning of **May 23** to be displayed with an opportunity for visitors to walk or drive by to see impressions of possibilities for our center city. The event will begin at **9am and conclude at 3pm**.”

One of the artists engaged in creating the sidewalk art is Erica Entrop. I was privileged to get to interview her using Zoom video conferencing. She is an amazing artist. Here is a link to her website:
<https://www.ericacentrop.com/>

Erica grew up in Roswell, NM, and graduated from the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque with a degree in Fine Arts. She has had several shows of her artwork in Santa Monica, CA, Chicago, IL, and Havana, Cuba. She lived in Los Angeles, CA, for a time and worked in art galleries there. She met Darwin Estacio Martinez there and they became engaged.

Her fiancé is a Cuban artist and since moving back to Oak Ridge she has been splitting her time between Havana and Oak Ridge. When the Covid-19 crisis hit, she, along with all other US citizens in Cuba were returned to the US.

When I interviewed Erica, she had just completed her 14-day isolation required because she had just returned from out of the country. She had used that time to work on the art she is creating to be a part of the replacement event for the “Paint the Town.”

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Erica’s art project is part of the effort to create concept art which will depict a downtown area filled with exciting and compelling retail, mixed use, entertainment and restaurants. The chalk art can be viewed from cars or by walking.

Traffic on Wilson Street will be slowly guided and one-way that day so viewers can stay in their car if they choose. Viewers may also walk along the route with monitors who will maintain six feet of social distance between walkers.

In addition to her major piece of artwork, Erica has created a logo for the “Makers Space” being envisioned for Oak Ridge. As the committee talked to people in the community about their wishes for what would be in our new downtown, one suggestion was for a maker space.

A maker space is a place that provides tools and space to create and to learn. Each community structures its own, but it might include woodworking and metalworking tools, an art space, a classroom with computers to learn website design or coding, or to have speakers on science, music, technology.

Pat Postma loved this idea and thought it was perfect for Oak Ridge. She decided our maker space should also have culinary classes. Pat volunteered to simulate a maker space for the big “Paint the Town” day.

She asked if Erica would be willing to design a logo for our maker space that represented these possibilities. As Pat says, “She nailed it!”. The logo will be included in the May 23 event as well.

I asked Erica what she hoped people would think of the event being planned in which she and other local artists are engaged. She responded by saying, “I hope people will be excited of the possibilities of a ‘Downtown’ area and will realize we can have safe and accessible events with a sense of community even while staying within the restricted crowd size and social distancing requirements of this unusual time.”

Erica went on to tell me about the art she is creating. She indicated it would be flavored by her having lived in Los Angeles and that it would have a romantic and classic movie moments type of emphasis. I am excited to see what she has created because I have seen her work online and she is certainly an accomplished artist.

Jim Dodson said of Erica, “Erica Entrop is a very unique artist in that she has the ability to show the elation, pain, joy, and commonplace expressions in people’s faces and body posture as they are going about their business in groups or in transit on public transportation. Her groups of people seem to be self-absorbed as our society was before the recent pandemic and now that we are required to social distance many of us look forward to a time where we can congregate in groups and engage in the simple act of face to face conversation without the buffer of a partitioned computer screen. I am looking forward to that time and Erica’s artistic representation of how that type of interaction would play out in our future downtown Oak Ridge!”

Finally, Erica suggested a theme she hoped to see included, **“Oak Ridge – The Secret’s Out!”** I love it! What do you think? Such creative thinking is welcome. Often fresh eyes and thoughts can bring out ideas that we who are so close to our issues just fail to recognize. When Erica mentioned that to me, I said, “You realize you have just given me the title for the column on which we are working!”

We are fortunate to have her in Oak Ridge and working with us on this project. You will be amazed by her art as well as the art of other artists that will be on display in our virtual downtown area.

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The creation of a Downtown area for Oak Ridge is a major initiative that many citizens support and see the potential. The May 23 event will be a first glimpse of what can be done there. The creative art, displays, and exciting approach to showing off this concept will be something we all will not want to miss.

Jim Dodson also encourages community involvement by stating, “While our 15 artists will be showing their impression of a future for downtown Oak Ridge others in our community may also participate from their homes the week leading up to the event by posting their artwork to the Explore Oak Ridge Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/events/569103127321970/> The drawings can be created at home on their driveways as many around the county have done to celebrate our frontline heroes during the pandemic.

Prizes will be awarded that day in the following categories: Best of Show Award – Sponsor, Jim Dodson; People’s Choice Award– Sponsor, TnBank; and Community Spirit Award – Sponsor, Oak Ridge Pharmacy.

We hope Oak Ridgers will join us on **Saturday, May 23rd from 9am to 3pm** on Wilson Street to experience the vision we have for our new Main Street and give us feedback about their ideas for making this new downtown a place of which we can all be proud! Plan NOW to be there to safely enjoy some amazing art and imagine the future Downtown Oak Ridge.



Erica Entrop, artist

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Erica working on her art for *Paint the Town - with Chalk*



"Expo Line" Acrylic on canvas, from the series *I, Voyeur* painted from images taken on the metro in Los Angeles, 2017

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"Reader" Acrylic on canvas, from the series *Passengers* from images taken in the New York Metro, 2018



"Reflections" Acrylic on canvas, from the Series *Passengers* from images taken in Havana, Cuba, 2019

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"The maker Space" logo for the envisioned Makers Space which has unlimited possibilities when it comes to the projects that are hoped to be fostered, incorporating elements of cooking, construction, education and art