

Boynton Beach transforms trash bins into art

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BOYNTON BEACH — Art can change the world, some say. At least, it can change a Dumpster - into something that looks more attractive.

The city this month commissioned a project that calls for artists to paint up to 20 trash containers.

Three are finished: a beach sunset in peaceful blue, hibiscus flowers and palm trees against an orange sky. The scenes reach all around each steel bin, images flowing over bumps and angles.

"Well, that is a strange object," said Bill Strecker, a Deerfield Beach artist who painted the sunset scene, which stands in front of city hall. "And the size too."

But a cool concept, nonetheless, said Barbara Ready, who sits on the city's arts commission.

"Anytime you can get art out there, and get people to talk about art, and to look at art, and to look at things in a different way, it's good," Ready said.

Not everybody felt that way when the idea arose last fall.

The arts commission rejected the proposal. Then it gained traction through the community redevelopment agency, which set aside \$10,000 for it.

Ten of the trash bins should be done by October. Of those 10, six have been selected so far.

"Arts are proven to jump-start revitalization," said Debby Coles-Dobay, the city's public art administrator.

"It isn't the most brilliant idea ever, but it is forward-thinking," said Jay Goulde, executive director of the Outdoor Arts Foundation, a nonprofit organization based in the Tampa Bay area.

Plus, what else are you going to do with an exposed Dumpster?

"It's ugly," Goulde said. "It has to be there."

The city has 1,600 trash bins, with an unknown number of them in clear view because they are exempt from an ordinance that calls for walls to shield them.

Sixty artists submitted designs for the project. The parameters: make the image simple, bright, colorful and easy to see. Plus throw in a little something that exemplifies old Boynton Beach or Old Florida, kind of like a classic postcard.

The artists get \$500 a piece, which pretty much covers supplies and gas to get to the public works warehouse to paint them. One perk: a clean bin and shade.

Christopher Burlini of Coral Springs spent most of last week layering latex paint for the orange-hued postcard scene destined for the library.

"You don't do this for the money," he said. "It takes a little extra effort."

Boynton Beach isn't the first city to see its square steel containers turn to canvas, so to speak.

Several years ago, brush strokes decorated bins in Dunedin, Safety Harbor and Clearwater - some in detailed fine art scenes. Many still stand.

The Outdoor Arts Foundation pushed Clearwater's 2002 project, which businesses paid for.

The foundation wanted to expand the concept throughout Hillsborough and Pinellas counties, but it proved too hard to secure private funding.

Dunedin's 2004 project - alligator-themed - was city-driven.

Boynton Vice Mayor Jose Rodriguez suggested the effort after he grew weary of driving past the Dumpster near his house behind the Women's Club.

He wanted something, anything, that would make the city's core more of a stunner.

"So when you come into Boynton Beach you don't go, 'This is Boynton Beach,'" he said.

"Instead you go, 'This is a beautiful town.'"