

**Best in the West Awards 2021 – A Celebration of Excellence
Award Nomination**

Entrant Name: Teri James, Executive Director

BIA Name: Downtown Langley Business Association

Title of Entry: Downtown Langley Mural Walk

Category: Programming and Partnerships

Timeframe of Project: Ongoing

Contact: Teri James | **P:** 604.539.0133 | **E:** info@downtownlangley.com

Opportunity / Need:

The Downtown Langley Mural Walk is the result of local artists seeking an opportunity to express their creativity on their own terms, and the DLBA seeking an opportunity to bring art, life and colour to the downtown core. When the two came together they created an incredible partnership. While the first murals in downtown Langley were painted as part of a beautification project, the success of the project uncovered the further opportunity to grow the murals into something more.

It became apparent that local artists were looking for an outlet where they could maintain control over their creative designs. But they were facing a challenge with the process to find a building that could be a canvas, gain support of property and business owners, as well as the costs of the supplies and the required cleaning and preparation of the building. The DLBA was able to support this side of the project and remove obstacles for the artists based on their relationship with property and business owners, and with marketing budgets available.

To date over 30 murals have been painted in downtown Langley, giving opportunity to 18 artists to express their creativity. Twenty-two of these murals are featured on the current Downtown Langley Mural Walk which brings over 1,500 people to downtown Langley annually.

Audience:

The primary audience for Downtown Dollars is the citizens of Langley City and of our neighbouring communities of Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley.

Goal / Objectives:

The initial goal for the murals in downtown Langley was purely a beautification project. However, once the project was started a wonderful opportunity was uncovered to take this beautification project to a whole new level. At that time, updated objectives were outlined:

- Create an opportunity for local artists to express their creativity on their terms
- Build a mural walk that would draw people to downtown Langley.

Implementation:

In 2017 murals began popping up throughout downtown Langley, both as commissioned pieces through Langley City and as part of a DLBA beautification project. Through the DLBA, a local artist was commissioned to paint murals in unsightly nooks and on highly visible walls to bring some colour and life to the downtown core and make the area more welcoming. This was particularly true for large walls that were often the target for graffiti.

Shortly after this successful project was completed, the Executive Director of the DLBA (Teri James) was approached by another local artist who shared a rendering of a mural she had designed and offered to paint the mural in downtown Langley

if Teri could find her a wall. The artist offered to paint the mural for simply the cost of the paint supplies, but only if she could express her creativity on her own terms. This sparked further conversations between Teri and the artist around the limited opportunities for art to be created outside of parameters that were often put into place when they were commissioned for work. The mural was completed for less than \$600 (which included the price of a lift rental for two days) and both Teri and the artist felt fulfilled by the project.

This uncovered an amazing opportunity to build a partnership between local artists, the DLBA and the downtown Langley community. We recognized that there was a need for artists to have the opportunity to express their creativity on a large scale, and to maintain creative control of their projects. We also understood that artists were facing challenges to execute these projects, including navigating the process to find a building that could be a canvas, gain support of property and business owners, and to cover the costs associated with cleaning and preparing the building and cost of supplies. By offering to cover the costs of the paint, cleaning and wall preparation, and by working within our existing relationships with property and business owners, we knew we could remove these obstacles and we could build a partnership that would be beneficial to both local artists and our community as a whole. Removing those obstacles for artists would result in an opportunity for the DLBA to efficiently expand the current beautification project and create a Mural Walk that could draw people to the area.

In 2019 we launched the Student Mural Competition with a goal to further enhance and grow the Mural Walk while strengthening our partnership with local artists. We welcomed students to submit their renderings and the top 5 submissions would get the opportunity to paint their mural in the community. The DLBA would cover all costs associated with each project, including building preparation and paint supplies, and the artists would donate their time and talent to complete the mural.

We were overwhelmed when we received over 30 submissions. It was seemingly impossible for our Community Based Panel to narrow these down to 5 finalists, and so ultimately 9 were selected. We worked with property and business owners to power wash buildings and coordinate schedules for the artwork to be completed. We discussed the project with a local paint supply company, explaining the impact it was having for local artists and for our community, and they agreed to sell the artists their supplies at cost. Our credit card was kept on file, and supplies were charged directly to it, under careful supervision of the manager of the company and our executive director.

Following this competition, and the media coverage that the project attracted, artists began proactively approaching the DLBA to ask for an opportunity to paint a mural in downtown Langley. The program evolved and there was no longer a set submission and selection process. Artists would reach out on an individual basis to submit their rendering. We would then work to find an available location and make arrangements for the artwork to be completed.

By the end of 2019, an additional 5 murals were added to downtown Langley using this process. Between these additions and the 9 murals from the Student Mural Competition we were able to add 14 new murals to downtown Langley during 2019, at a cost of just under \$7,000.

We continued to grow and enhance the Downtown Langley Mural Walk throughout 2020. While navigating the unique challenges that this year brought, we were still able to safely add 3 more murals to downtown Langley. We updated our marketing materials and launched a refreshed Downtown Langley Mural walk featuring murals that were safely accessible, and removing those that required access to inside buildings etc.

We also recognized that people were looking for cost effective, local, safe, and outdoor activities to take part in, and we saw an opportunity to leverage this and promote our Mural Walk using social media. We put a call out for local social media influencers and ran a contest to engage 5 local influencers to be downtown Langley Ambassadors who would take part in the Downtown Langley Mural Walk and share with their followers. The promised honorarium for each Ambassador was \$300 downtown dollars, and an additional \$100 downtown dollars to run their own social media contest. We had over 100 influencers apply for these 5 coveted positions, extending our social media reach to their total of over 43,000 followers.

To date over 30 murals have been painted in downtown Langley, giving opportunity to 18 artists to express their creativity. What began as a beautification project has grown into an engaging partnership that resulted in the Downtown Langley Mural Walk bringing over 1,500 people to downtown Langley annually. The response from property and business owners, our

community and local artists has been exceptional. Artists have shared stories of members of the community stopping to ask if they can place a brushstroke, just so they can feel like they were part of the mural. Artists have communicated that the significance of painting these murals was that they were given a platform to be creative and that we have created an environment where they are free to express themselves. This was an open invitation offered to students, new artists, established artists, and artists who had never painted a mural before.

Business owners have provided feedback regularly about the customers who stop in to eat a meal, grab a warm drink or make a purchase while they are on the Mural Walk. They have made the effort to let us know that the Downtown Langley Mural Walk is bringing business through their doors. With 4 additional murals so far scheduled to go up in 2021, we are confident this program will continue and our partnership with local artists will continue to flourish for many years to come.

Results:

- To date there are 32 murals located in downtown Langley
 - 15 as a part of the initial beautification project
 - 17 as a result of the DLBA partnership with local artists with four more murals committed in 2021
- All of the murals completed as a part of the partnership with the DLBA have allowed artists to have complete creative control over their work
- Our #MuralWalkLangley social media hashtag was used over 500 times in 2020 alone.
- Over 1,500 people complete the Mural Walk annually
- The Downtown Langley Mural Walk was reported by community members to be the #1 Langley City activity in 2020, with participation even exceeding the very popular trail walks
- Graffiti is down significantly in the City of Langley as the mural art has been respected by the graffiti artists. To date we have had only 1 mural vandalized, and it was repaired immediately
- To date, numerous communities have contacted us to ask how they can coordinate their own Mural Competition and ongoing mural program

Messages of appreciation from our participating artists:

"It was incredible to paint a mural here in Langley and be a part of creating a positive environment. As someone who didn't grow up in the area it was also eye opening to interact with the businesses in the area and I have since come to love downtown Langley even more than before!" *Jordan Ravensberg – artist*

"As I was painting, I was able to interact with so many people in the community who appreciated what I was doing to help beautify the City. It was very rewarding that I was able to come to the DLBA with my ideas and they worked extremely hard on two different occasions to find suitable locations for me." *Alex Stewart – artist*

"I have been painting murals in Langley City for many years and working with the DLBA is virtually seamless. I have even had the pleasure of partnering with other muralists to bring a piece of art to life and they are supportive, appreciative and absolutely amazing to work with." *Judy Pohl - artist*

Project Costs:

Mural Supply Costs for 17 Murals	\$ 8,200
Brochure Design and Print	\$ 3,200
Website Costs	\$ 1,200
Ambassador Costs	<u>\$ 1,500</u>
 TOTAL COST	 \$14,100