

Graffiti artists go legit

Painting by Watsonville teens is tribute to spirit of community

By KEITH MURAOKA

Sentinel staff writer

WATSONVILLE — Eight teenagers busily spray-painted graffiti on the 44-foot-long, 12-foot-high wall. Unlike most graffiti acts, these "artists" worked under the watchful eyes of appreciative onlookers and with the OK of the Watsonville Police Department.

Chief graffiti artist Mario Martinez conceded afterward that this was one of his first "legal" pieces. The 17-year-old heads up a Watsonville graffiti group called, "Hit and Run," whose work up to now has mostly been of the illegal variety.

Martinez has been caught spray-painting graffiti twice. "This is a lot better than getting arrested," Martinez said, adding that he still dabbles in the illegal end of graffiti-

writing.

Doing legal graffiti "does take some of the excitement out of it," Martinez conceded. "Part of the fun of graffiti is hiding out and trying to get away with it."

But Martinez' mother, Blanca Esquivel, is certainly glad to see her son go legal.

"This is something positive for him and the rest of the kids," Esquivel said. "Mario has always liked to draw. I remember in grammar school, the school would call and say, 'Your child is doing nothing but drawing.'"

The newest piece, which took more than 12 hours to complete last week, spells out "City of Watsonville." It was done as a tribute to the fighting spirit of the city, which is bouncing back from last October's devastating earthquake.

The graffiti mural is located on a back wall behind a cluster of buildings along the 400 block of Main Street. It faces a city-owned parking lot, and can be seen by passing motorists on Union Street.

Besides spelling out, "City of Watsonville," the graffiti depicts the Tasmanian Devil cartoon character. It states the mural is dedicated to the people of Watsonville, and is signed — albeit with nicknames — of the eight artists. They included: Romerio Arispi, Nick Corrales, Manual Zamora, Steve Castillo, Joseph Torrez, Lito Esquivel and Phillip Gonzalez.

One admirer compared the graffiti to what Watsonville has gone through since the earthquake. "The Tasmanian Devil kind of rep-

Please see GRAFITTI — A12

REFER

Grafitti

Continued from Page A1

resents the earthquake, and the letters in 'Watsonville' are sort of fractured, just as the city was after the quake," he said.

Martinez didn't philosophize so much in coming up with the design. "They told me they wanted, 'City of Watsonville' in it, and I've always liked the Tasmanian Devil," he said.

The grafitti mural was commissioned by business owners along the 400 block of Main Street as part of Sunday Celebration. The mini-festival is being held each Sunday afternoon to let the public know that Watsonville is alive and well, said business owner Jane Hall.

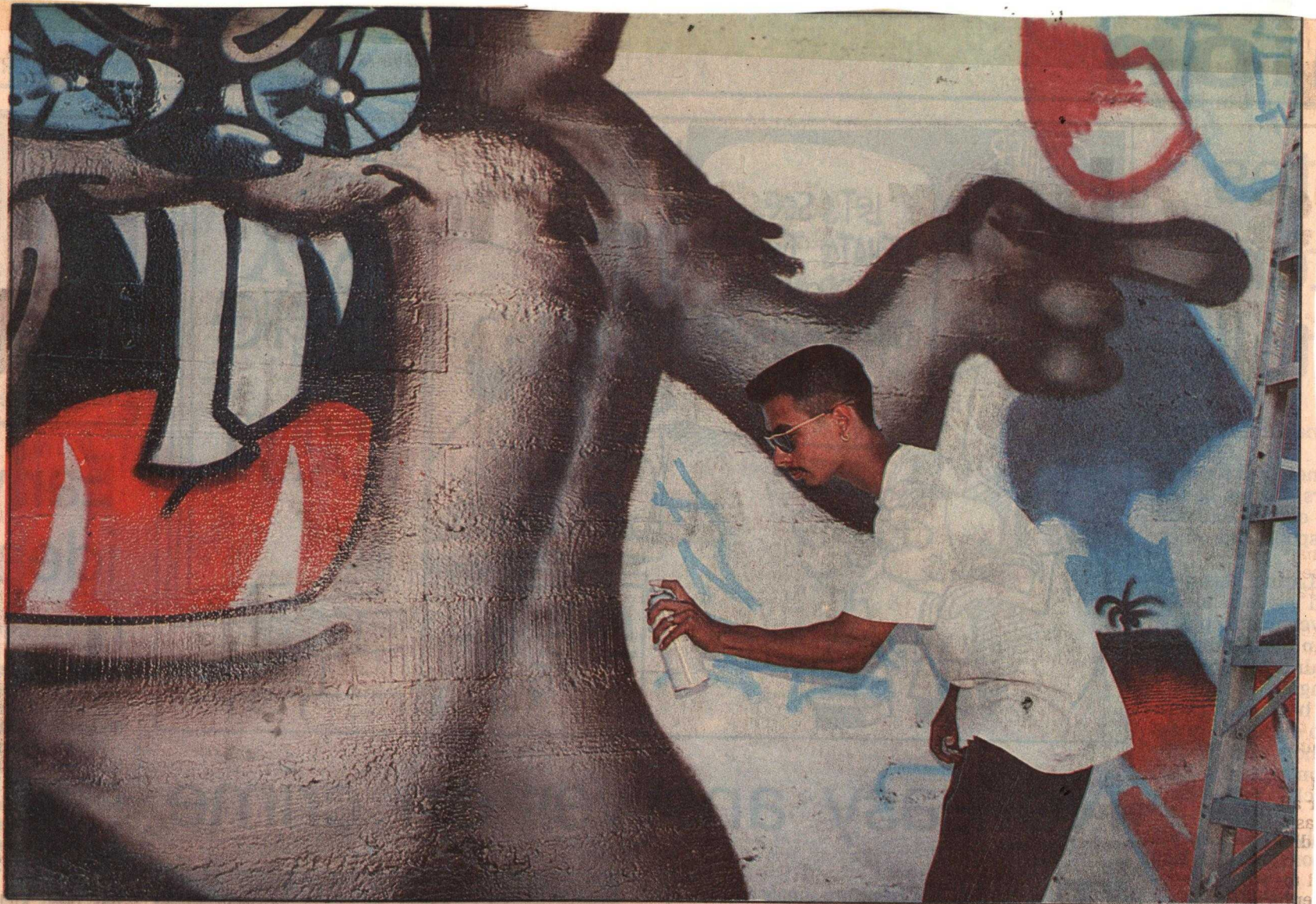
Hall, who owns the building which the grafitti mural is on, said that she's already been contacted by another business owner, who wants to donate wall space.

Watsonville Police Chief Terry Medina said he has mixed feelings about the grafitti artwork.

"This is the first mural that really looks like grafitti," he said. "It's hard to say how different segments of the community might react to it."

Medina hopes that the mural won't encourage more illegal grafitti.

A more traditional mural that Martinez worked on this summer — a cooperative venture of the Pajaro Valley Arts Council and Salud Para La Gente — will be dedicated at a block party next Sunday. Merchant Street between East Beach and Trafton streets will be closed from noon to 5 p.m. for the celebration.



Grafitti artist Mario Martinez puts some finishing touches on a 44-foot long, 12-foot high mural in the 400 block of Main Street.

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

S.C. Sent
9-17-90