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FEATURED

Muralist restores historic advertising artwork

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Artist Kathy Piccione is restoring the advertising artwork on the northside of La Casa Grande on Fourth St. Originally from Beloit, Piccione has traveled back and forth between the Midwest and the Southwest where she does murals and has her own line of artwork. She loves working on Native American portraits and most recently has art depicting Catholic saints.

Hillary Gavan

BELOIT — Artist Kathy Piccione is back in her hometown of Beloit to restore a colorful piece of history on the north side of La Casa Grande, 618 Fourth St.



She is bringing vintage advertisements for Coca-Cola and Galvanic soap back to their former glory. On Wednesday, visitors were stopping to watch her work and inquiring about the project.

“Beloit is excited to have this restored,” Piccione said

She started three weeks ago and estimates it will be complete in another week. The images are estimated to be 100 to 110 years old.

The advertisements which blanket the entire wall of the structure were discovered in 2005 when La Casa Grande owner Peter Gabriel was adding a banquet hall to his restaurant. When siding was removed to show off the exposed brick, the colorful ads became apparent.

“I wanted to preserve the history,” Gabriel said.

Gabriel said he had acquired the former Busberg Furniture building in 1996. It’s roots stemmed back to its operation as the Rex Theatre prior to 1929 and the Ellis Theatre in the 1970s. Gabriel rented the building out to Rent-a-Center before opening La Casa Grande in 2003.

As part of his efforts to renovate his Fourth Street properties, he hired longtime friend and artist Kathy Piccione. The daughter of the late Dominick and Nancy Piccione and sister of Pamela Larsen has a long connection with Beloit having grown up here and run the Sun Bed & Surf Shop, 114 W Grand Ave. with family before launching her art career in the Southwest. She also shares Sicilian ancestry like Gabriel.

Piccione has been conducting lots of detective work to unearth the original images which she estimates have been painted over with different ads several times. The image of the Coca-Cola, Galvanic soap and a lumber ad on top are estimated to be the second layer which became more visible in sunlight.

Piccione will be creating a special ad for Gabriel's businesses on the top in the space replacing the lumber ad and will restore the original Coca-Cola and Galvanic soap ads which cover the bulk of the building's side. Because portions of the soap ad were worn away, she found a picture of the image on a vintage crate online.

Piccione graduated from Beloit Turner High School in 1982. After running the Sun Bed & Surf Shop with her family for a decade she moved to Las Vegas where she worked as a massage therapist. She started learning how to make iron furniture and faux finishes which led her to mural work La Vegas. She moved back to Wisconsin in 1999 and assisted with creating the murals in Domenico's for Gabriel in 2000 and did design work for La Casa Grande in 2003 as her brother, Mike Piccione, did contracting work for the project.

During the past decade she's traveled back and forth between Beloit and Nevada, Utah and New Mexico where she's done murals for large homes and commercial work for smaller casinos. In 2011, she opened a gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico featuring her own fine art, primarily Native American portraits, horses and nature scenes. Piccione's ex-husband had Native American roots, and in more recent years

Piccione had discovered she has Native American ancestry as well. Piccione likes to incorporate iconography such as the medicine wheel or eagle feathers in her work to spur conversation and to help educate people on Native American culture.

She is also working on a series of art of Catholic saints she hopes to continue.

Piccione has had a few bumpy years, but hasn't let it stop her from her love of large scale artwork.

In 2012, she had a life-threatening bicycle accident and had to have facial reconstruction. She's been back in Beloit for the last couple of years to take care of a relative and most recently to recover from a double hip replacement perhaps stemming from so much time spent climbing ladders and scaffolding . Once her work with Gabriel is done, she plans to move to Scottsdale, Arizona to continue her creativity. For more information people can visit <https://www.kathleenpiccione.com>.

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