

FORT BRAGG UNVEILS CITY'S LARGEST MURAL



A ribbon cutting commemorating the mural took place on Oct. 5th. Holding the scissors is Mark Ruedrich, co-founder of the North Coast Brewing Company and its first Brewmaster. Larry Foster and his wife, Mary, are standing to Ruedrich's right. **CONTRIBUTED**

By Carole Brodsky
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On October 5th, one of KelpFest! 2025's pièce de résistance events took place: the official "un-whaling" of a co-created mural depicting a Grey Whale in Kelp, located on the north wall of the North Coast Brewing Company.

Dozens of people gathered across the street at the North Coast Brewing Company Pub for an informal presentation by Lia Morsell, designer, curator, and manager of Fort Bragg's Alleyway Art Project. It is the 16th mural to be produced in Fort Bragg, with generous support from the Arts Council of Mendocino County.

Morsell acknowledged the City of Fort Bragg for its support of the project, noting that the original whale image was created by legendary cetacean artist Larry Foster, who worked intensively with muralist Marta Alonso Canillar. The piece is now the City's largest mural - a staggering 56 feet long.

"The City of Fort Bragg has been extraordinarily generous. They expedited everything and explained everything," Morsell noted. She continued by recognizing the Blue Economy Project and the Nature Conservancy, as well as the Brewery. "The Brewery staff was so patient, and everyone there took a huge leap of faith with this project." She also recognized the original catalyst for the

project- Kiersten Hanna of Braggadood, who suggested to Morsell that a mural of Foster's whales would be a perfect fit for the Alleyway Project. "Kiersten said, 'Larry's images are so beautiful, and we should have them in our town. Kiersten was invaluable with logistics, mockups, and consulting,'" Morsell continued.

Larry Foster needs no introduction, but it's always fun to hear the story from the whale's tail.

"It was about 1938 when my dad told me that dinosaurs were not the biggest animals in the world," he told the attendees. "He told me that whales got a lot bigger, and they didn't bite. I started doing whales full-time." Foster began by photographing whales, "No one really knew what a Blue Whale looked like. The analogy was akin to trying to reconstruct a Studebaker Land Cruiser from a photo taken by CHP after an accident." Foster went on to become the creator of the world's most anatomically correct whale depictions. His landmark work was hailed by Dr. James Mead, Curator of Marine Mammals at the Smithsonian Institution, and he worked for National Geographic for a decade. "Larry Foster has turned whale illustration into a science. The depictions that he has done are the most anatomically correct I have seen," said Dr. Mead. Hanna was the graphic designer for Foster's landmark book, "The Art of Discovering

Whales."

"It's the only memoir he's ever written," smiles Mary Foster, Larry's wife.

Painting Foster's illustration of the Blue Whale became the responsibility of Canillar, who has been a resident of Mendocino since 2001. "I wasn't kidding when I said I wanted to paint big, but I never thought I would be doing anything this big," she grinned.

The duo, with lots of support from Hanna, created a way to work that enabled Foster to communicate specific and precise characteristics of the whale to Canillar. "I spent a lot of time on the scissor lift," she smiled. "Larry and Mary were a pleasure. The experience was fun, challenging, and extremely meticulous," she laughed.

Whales recognize each other by their tails- and the "notch," the central indentation in their tail, had to be absolutely perfect. "That's the first part we worked on," Canillar continued. "The lines had to be just so. I'd be on the scissor lift, on the phone with Larry and Mary, who were sitting in the car. They'd say, 'Get out of the way so I can take a look at it,'" she continued, to lots of laughter. "I had to learn how to paint at a monumental scale. Even the barnacles had to be painted very specifically."

"With the exception of the great masters, I can't think of any instance

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where an artist has had to produce the work of another artist,” Mary Foster noted. “Marta deserves an Academy Award!”

Jennifer Owen, CEO of the North Coast Brewing Company, couldn’t be happier with the project.

“The Brewery had a big wall crying to have something on it,” she explained.

“Marta was on that lift every day, so there were lots of conversations happening through the windows,” she smiled. She repeated her thanks to the Arts Council and the City of Fort Bragg, which both provided funding for the project. “It speaks a lot about our town, helping to preserve our environmental sustainability. The whale’s ecosystem is linked to the kelp, which is why it’s so important.”

Owen hinted that perhaps some whale-inspired products will find



Legendary painter Larry Foster, muralist Marta Alonso Canillar, and Lia Morsell, designer, curator, and manager of the Fort Bragg Alleyway Art Program.

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their way to the storefront in the future, and the mural is just the latest in the Brewery’s ongoing support of organizations and community projects that advance sustainable initiatives, reverse their carbon footprint, serve the community, and give back to the world.

The group crossed the street to prepare for the official ribbon-cutting. Fort Bragg Mayor Jason Godeke noted, “Our town is getting known for its murals. Last week, there were 100 7th Graders walking around, looking at all the murals. My eighth-grade art students already know about the ‘doodle grid’ that exists under the paint,” he smiled. The doodling he was referring to was created by Canillar as part of a grid system needed to define line and shape. “I created the grid using words about whale facts and beer facts. At one point, someone walked by and said, ‘Doesn’t look like art to me,’” she laughs. “It turned into quite the Facebook controversy.”

Tristan Anoush McHew is the Kelp Project Director with the Nature Conservancy. “This is really a serendipitous moment,” she said to the guests. “The ongoing relationship with the City, Alleyway, and the

launching of KelpFest- It’s a time of birth and renewal, to love our kelp forests where the whales hang out, and to elevate this ecosystem, which this community

deeply relies upon,” she concluded.

View the mural at 455 N. Main Street, and learn more about this mural and the other murals that

are part of the Fort Bragg Alleyway Art Project at <https://fortbraggalleyway-art.org>. Check in at the Pub for a taste of Grey Whale Pale Ale.

