



Lydia Powell, left, works with David Marshall, coordinator of the mural project, on the artwork adorning a passageway underneath an I-295 overpass.

Staff photo by Doug Jones

Graffiti mars youngsters' mural

The youths are painting a passageway near I-295 as part of a community-service art project.

By **FELIX DOLIGOSA JR.**
Staff Writer

A vibrant palate of turquoise, purple and red punctuates the Portland skyline in a mural that is nearing completion in a passageway under Deering Avenue. But clashing with the renditions of the Eastland Park Hotel

and buildings in the downtown commercial district are silver spray-painted waves and lettering, left by a graffiti vandal.

"I'm not too surprised," says David Marshall, an artist who is coordinating the mural project for Portland West, a social service agency. "It's not the end of the world. It is still recoverable at this point."

The graffiti damaged three weeks of work on the 45-foot-by-35-foot mural in a passageway underneath the Deering Avenue overpass. The passageway links

Deering Oaks with Fitzpatrick Stadium.

Despite the vandalism, Portland West is pushing ahead with the work, part of the group's Service Works program for troubled youths. The program offers community-service projects that allow juvenile offenders to make restitution for their offenses under supervised conditions, while learning and practicing life skills.

More than 1,400 youths have

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participated in the project over the past seven years, contributing more than \$700,000 worth of community service in Greater Portland. They've removed more than 172,000 square feet of graffiti.

Marshall, the artist leading the project, notes that buildings with murals are less likely to be hit by graffiti. However, the Deering Avenue passageway is a very popular spot for graffiti.

"This place gets tagged all the time," said Marshall, who expects the mural to be done in a few weeks. "If those behind this

graffiti were truly artists, they would respect it and not tag over it."

The group will apply varnish to protect the work against future graffiti attacks.

The mural is funded by a \$7,500 grant from the Maine Arts Commission. It depicts the Portland skyline. Previously, the group painted a mural on Danforth Street.

"It's the first time the city is trying to turn graffiti into something positive," Marshall said. "This shows a positive form of expression."

More than 50 youths are working on the mural, with some having experience in graffiti art, said Marshall.

Lydia Powell, 15, of Portland, said she has never used spray paint, but she likes to paint landscapes with watercolors. Powell repainted the mural's blue sky Tuesday.

"It's for the community. The graffiti is pretty ridiculous," she said.

The city and Portland West will spend about \$28,000 this year cleaning graffiti, and young people performing community service this year will scrub 40,000 square feet of vandalized walls.

"Not cleaning up the graffiti is like never picking up your trash," Marshall said.

Staff Writer Felix Doligosa Jr. can be contacted at 791-6335 or at:

fdoligosa@pressherald.com