

Republican-American

Momentum builds for Winsted project

BY JIM MOORE
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

WINSTED — The effort to transform a former factory along the Still River into the home of a national art exhibit continues to build momentum. The Newman's Own Foundation announced recently a \$500,000 challenge grant for the American Mural Project, pushing total fundraising to \$1.5 million.

"This is a huge moment. This grant allows us to move it forward with the construction ... We're reaching the tipping point, as they say," Sharon artist Ellen Griesedieck said. "It's kicking over."

The project, originally known as the Wall of America and brainchild of Griesedieck, returned to her studio from a road trip Monday.

Elements of what will one day

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PHOTO BY JUDY GRIESEDIECK, AMERICAN MURAL PROJECT

Sharon artist Ellen Griesedieck shows a group of New York City children parts of the American Mural Project which were on display in a Manhattan gallery over the weekend. The project, to be installed in Winsted, involves the efforts of thousands of artists, engineers and children working collaboratively on a massive mural that will be a tribute to American workers.

PROJECT: Even Newman's own tissues went

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be a 120-foot-wide, 48-foot-tall mixed media tribute to American workers and industry were on display last week at Gallery Henoch in New York. With a number of celebrities and members of the local community on hand, Paul Newman and Jane Curtin hosted a charity auction Thursday that raised upward of \$40,000 — including \$50 given for a box of Newman's own tissues.

"He had a cold and he auctioned off his Kleenex box," Griesedieck said, adding that the item drew plenty of interest. "The thing ended at \$50. It was hilarious."

Fundraising began not long after Griesedieck's idea took shape in 1998, with contributions of \$5 and more from private individuals at the start. The Newman's Own Foundation awarded a \$200,000 matching grant in 2006 and a \$100,000 contribution from Alcoa Howmet was announced last month. Local businesses and community groups have also

added tens of thousands to the total.

With an estimated \$3.3 million required to transform the former Whiting Mills buildings along the banks of the Still River into the American Mural Project's new home, about \$1.5 million has been raised to date, Griesedieck said. Matching the latest Newman's Own Foundation grant will push the project past the \$2 million mark.

Renovation of the building could start as early as spring.

Griesedieck said collaborative art projects that will be included in the finished piece have already involved thousands of children across the country, working in conjunction with professional artists, scientists and explorers. Eventually, one or more projects from each of the 50 states will be included.

"The magnitude of it is almost mind boggling," said JoAnn Ryan, president of the Northwest Connecticut Chamber of Commerce and one of several local business leaders who have joined the Wall of



PHOTO BY JUDY GRIESEDIECK, AMERICAN MURAL PROJECT

Actor Paul Newman, suffering from a cold, auctions a box of Kleenex during an auction benefit for the American Mural Project in New York Thursday night. Sharon artist Ellen Griesedieck, center, stands next to actress Jane Curtin as the bids start coming in.

America Foundation's board of directors.

As for the Newman's Own Foundation grant, "I think now it will trigger tremendous interest on the part of the country," Ryan said, adding she expects

members of the local business community will continue to support the project as well.

"It is going to bring thousands and thousands of people to this region," Ryan said.