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Winsted tribute to American worker moves ahead

BY JIM MOORE
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WINSTED — With a growing list of friends, donors, advisers and artists on board, Ellen Griesedieck's dream of converting a former factory here into a national art and education center presses forward.

Griesedieck's plan to build a massive, mixed-media mural in tribute to American workers has grown in recent years from a tiny foundation accepting donations of a few dollars at a time into a major enterprise overseen by famous faces that is pursuing grants from large foundations.

"Construction should be under way next year," Griesedieck said Tuesday outside the former Whiting Mills building.

The ever-optimistic Griesedieck concedes a lot has to happen between now and then, and she is actively soliciting contributions from business leaders, government agencies and charitable foundations. The U.S. Environmental Protection



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Agency recently awarded a \$200,000 grant to finance removal of lingering contamination from the site of the former undergarment factory, Griesedieck said, and that work will begin in September, "as soon as we get the check."

An estimated \$540,000 has been raised to date of the \$2.7 million that will be required for the first phase of the project, with half of that total needed to renovate the building and raise the roof to accommodate the mural measuring 120 feet wide

by 48 feet tall. The other half of the money raised will establish a fund to support operations and educational programs.

"If you don't raise half for organization and programs, you can't sustain yourself," Griesedieck explained. "This has to go on forever."

Local officials hope that it does, with anticipated benefits extending well past the town line.

"We think it's going to be important to northwest Connecticut," said Litchfield Bancorp

CEO Mark E. Macomber, whose bank co-sponsored a May 10 gathering at Griesedieck's studio in Sharon with Northwest Community Bank. "It's just one more thing in Litchfield County to bring people in."

Thousands of students across the country have already taken part in various art projects that will be incorporated into the mural which already includes giant paintings and other works of art in ceramic, glass and metal which depict the work of surgeons, space scientists, miners and metalworkers.

NASA committed in April to providing a film crew to document a project which will match kids with scientists and engineers from the Mars Exploration Rover project, Griesedieck said.

Griesedieck recently returned from Wisconsin, where she and a group of three dozen schoolchildren there worked with Scott Mitchem of Enviro-Recovery, Inc. to fashion a pair of 28-foot axes from timber.