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Griesedieck: Progress Being Made in Winsted

By MICHAEL MARCIANO
Editor

WINSTED — Wall of America Foundation founder Ellen Griesedieck of Sharon has heard the complaints about old factory buildings that need to be fixed. "The process may be slow to everyone who's looking," she said, "but to those of us who are doing it, we are moving along very successfully."

Griesedieck recently passed the halfway mark in her quest to raise \$1 million for the American Mural Project, a massive artistic tribute to American laborers. The mural's components will eventually be housed and fused together in a retired mill building on Whiting Street, but the task of raising funds for the project must precede the work.

"Raising all this money its kind of boring in one sense," the artist acknowledged, "but it's a necessary requirement. We're going to rebuild the Parthenon in Winsted."

With donations coming in a few thousand dollars at a time, Griesedieck received a boost this week from the Community Foundation of Northwest Connecticut, which gave \$15,000 to the Wall of America Foundation, which oversees the mural project. The grant is yet another sign, she said, that local supporters are giving inspiration and strength to an interna-

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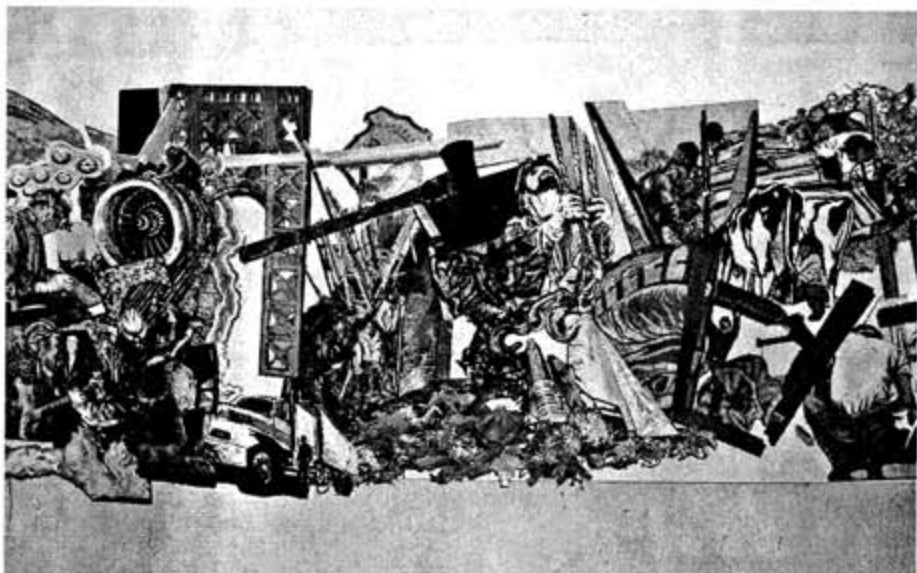


PHOTO BY MICHAEL MARCIANO

Ellen Griesedieck's American Mural Project — a model of which is shown here — will be nearly 50 feet tall and 120 feet long.

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tionally recognized undertaking.

"Everyone in Winsted is way behind this and they've been very enthusiastic," Griesedieck said. "In the next 12 months we're going to get the \$1 million that we need."

The money will be used to pay for the first phase of renovations at 100 Whiting St. The old mill building will become a giant art studio and office space.

A scale model of the American Mural Project shows just how complex the finished product will be. Standing nearly 50 feet high and spanning 120 feet, the three-dimensional painting will be a collage of interconnecting themes celebrating everything from airline and steel workers to dancers, athletes and school children. The mural will include artistic tributes to workers from all 50 states.

During her 50-state tour collecting pieces to be incorporated into the piece, Griesedieck plans to visit as many as 10,000 people, incorporating their culture and history into the mural as it takes shape here in the Laurel City.

Underscoring the scope of the project, Griesedieck is now working with Wisconsin residents on collecting loads of 200-year-old wood from the bottom of Lake Superior to fashion a 28-foot-long axe, which will be suspended in the center of the mural. If the mural was a dollar bill, the axe would fit inside the portrait of George Washington.

"We will actually make two 28-foot axes," Griesedieck added. "We will use one in the mural and the other



PHOTO BY DAVID FINE

From left, Winsted's Bill Harding joins Wall of America founder Ellen Griesedieck and Ann Auburn and Guy Rovezzi from the Community Foundation of Northwest Connecticut in celebrating a \$15,000 grant from the foundation for the American Mural Project.

one will go to the kids involved with the project." She said she plans to leave each community with a similar memento to serve as a connection to the completed mural.

In addition to boasting a heavy-weight board of advisors, including actor Paul Newman and former vice presidential candidate Winona LaDuke, Griesedieck has formed a local board made up of noted folks

from the Torrington-Winsted community. The board includes Friends of Main Street Director Barbara DeBellis, Northwestern Connecticut Community College President Barbara Douglass, Northwest Community Bank President John Ursone, Northwest Chamber of Commerce President Joann Ryan, the Howmet Corporation's Laurie Roy and Winsted businessman Bill Harding.

"What this proves is Winsted and

the civic and business leaders in town really want this to happen," Griesedieck said.

And having conceived the idea in 1998, Griesedieck may know better than anyone the value of patience.

"You've got to be somewhat insane to do this," she said. "It can be a nightmare of one thing after the other, so there has to be real love and dedication."