

Percy Julian Celebrated With School Mosaic

Oak Park Education Foundation to once again transform the side of a school with an African American legend.

By Shari Noland
Chicago Defender
Contributing Writer

When you first witness the 330-square-foot mosaic dedicated to Gwendolyn Brooks on her namesake middle school at the corner of Washington Blvd. and Clinton Ave. in Oak Park, its beauty is what captures you. It literally stops traffic. The slivers of colorful mirrors and glazed tiles in all kinds of shapes and sizes are breathtaking. And the swirls of circles with paintings of Gwendolyn Brooks herself, and other women of courage -- Maya Angelou, Jane Addams, Malala Yousafzai and Michelle Obama -- will leave you in awe. But look a little closer and you'll notice that it's not just another pretty design. It's a community affair. The faces and names of more than 80 individuals and businesses who donated to help make the project come to life are in beautiful tiles creatively weaved into the mosaic.

It's an amazing transformation of a plain grey school wall that was celebrated last September at its unveiling. And now it's about to happen all over again with another Oak Park namesake school, African American legend and former resident -- Percy Julian, a pioneering scientist and Civil Rights activist.

"We were inspired to create a second project to build off the success of our middle school mo-

saic mural last summer at Brooks, dedicated to the renowned poet and school namesake in honor of her 100th birthday," explained Executive Director of the Oak Park Education Foundation, Tracy Dell'Angela Barber. "It was a huge success and it did indeed reach the whole school community, as well as the broader Oak Park community."

The mosaics are created through a partnership of the Oak Park Education Foundation (OPEF), renowned artist Tracy Van Duinen, who is also a visual arts teacher at Oak Park River Forest High School, and Oak Park's District 97. This year, Van Duinen is working closely with Percy Julian Middle School art teachers Ed Magierski and Phil Switowicz. Students who attend OPEF's BASE Camp, a summer project-based program, will have the opportunity to create the colorful and informative mosaic, learning about micro and macro pieces, sculptural elements, photo transfer, and tile preparation. Van Duinen's design will incorporate scientific symbols and resemble an elaborate molecular structure. OPEF, which is entirely funded through donations and its BASE Camp offerings, will once again be raising funds by selling tiles to individuals and businesses in the community.

"We have committed significant resources to these two school mural projects because we believe that the African American namesakes of our two middle



Picture courtesy of Oak Park Education Foundation/Alexa Rogals/Wednesday Journal.

schools should be honored in this remarkable way," said Dell'Angela Barber.

Van Duinen has worked at Oak Park River Forest High School for four years and is a member of the Chicago Public Arts Group. He received a Golden Apple Award in 2001 while working as a teacher at Austin Community Academy High School in Chicago.

OPEF is a nonprofit based in Oak Park with a mission to bring artists, architects, scientists, and technology experts into K-8th grade public school classrooms in the local school district. The project will be completed over the summer during its BASE Camp, which is a wide selection of paid summer enrichment offerings. One of the more popular BASE Camp activities for the past eight years has been the mural project.

If you find yourself in Oak Park,



Picture courtesy of Oak Park Education Foundation/Alexa Rogals/Wednesday Journal.

it's definitely worth a look to see is plenty of nearby parking. For the the current mosaic at Gwendolyn latest updates on the upcoming Brooks Middle School. It's only installment at Percy Julian Middle a short walk from the Oak Park School, go to <https://www.opef.org/mosaic-mural/>.

Travis Garza Fat Loss Camp Opens on South Side

Pounds are falling off as people get into shape with the fitness camps and healthy eating plans offered at Travis Garza Fat Loss Camps. A new center, owned by Jackie Clark Edwards, Rick Edwards, Nakia Samuels and Mitchell Samuels, opened last week at 9406 S. Perry.



Owners: Jackie Clark Edwards, Rick Edwards, Nakia Samuels, Mitchell Samuels



The doors of the center prepare clients for what to expect.