Bull Mountain Arts and Chamber host ribbon cutting for new mural on the Mayo River Rail Trail.

They say you can't have StuART without Art — and today, that's more than just a play on words. It's a truth we're here to celebrate.

We gather to mark the completion of this extraordinary mural by Jon Murrill, and we do so at a meaningful moment: Patrick County begins its 250th anniversary celebration. What better way to honor that milestone than by planting a piece of public art right here in the heart of our community — something bold, something beautiful, something that belongs to all of us.

Because here's the thing about Stuart: art doesn't just decorate this town. Art helped to build this town.

The history of this place was shaped by the hands of artisans — the quilter at her frame to the industrial frames of the textile industry, the woodworker in his shop, and the baker pulling bread from the oven. It was built by the careful art of preserving food for a long winter, by the craft of making music that carried people through hard times — and yes, by the time-honored and *highly skilled* art of crafting moonshine. And of course, by the greasy hands from crafting race car motors. Stuart's identity has always been woven from these threads, and every one of them is an art form.

This mural honors that spirit. It honors the landscape that has inspired artists and artisans and ordinary people for generations — these mountains, these rivers, bathed in a particular light. And it does something equally important: it preserves that inheritance for the children and grandchildren who will walk past this wall for decades to come.

Take a look at what Jon has placed on this wall. There is a childlike wonder in this work — the kind of wonder that makes you stop and crouch down to look at the rocks in a riverbed, or watch a crawdad move through the shallows. That curiosity, that delight in small things, is something we are all born with. And somewhere along the way, too many of us lose it. This mural is a reminder: *stay curious*. Explore. Pay attention to the world around you — to the critters and the currents, the colors and the quiet.

We've seen that curiosity alive and well this past week. People have been coming out every day to watch Jon work, drawn by the process itself, mesmerized by a blank wall becoming something alive. That, right there, is the power of what public art is supposed to do.

And my hope — and the hope of organizations like Bull Mountain Arts —is that this momentum continues to grow. Jon has now given Stuart two murals, and with each one,

the door to public art opens a little wider. We keep proving that it's possible that our community will show up for it, that we will keep saying yes to beauty in unexpected places.

But none of this is possible without community. And once again, this project is proof of that.

The Chamber of Commerce helped navigate landowner agreements and spread the word. Bull Mountain Arts facilitated this entire project and stood alongside the artist every step of the way. The Town of Stuart stepped up with equipment and logistics. Our generous donor made the funding possible. And Pickle and Ash made sure we had something good to eat and drink to help celebrate — because this is Patrick County, and we do things right.

To every person who played a part: thank you. This mural is yours too.

To Jon Murrill: thank you for bringing your talent to our walls and your curiosity to our community.

And to everyone standing here today — welcome to something that will outlast all of us. Welcome to public art in Stuart, Virginia.

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