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KATHLEEN CABBLE

CREW Tampa Bay and other groups are rejuvenating downtown Tampa's uptown area along the 800 and 900 blocks of Franklin Street where art will be placed over vacant building windows.

Artists' rendering: Paintings to replace blight, provide vision

BY JANET LEISER
STAFF WRITER

TAMPA — For months, more than two dozen artists have toiled with paint and plywood, creating more than 600 feet of scenery to reflect what shops might one day fill Franklin Street's vacant storefronts.

"ArtLoud," a grassroots project sponsored by Commercial Real Estate Women Tampa Bay, is expected to be unveiled Saturday to city officials as the Gasparilla Arts Festival goes on nearby.

"The biggest complaint in north downtown is people don't feel safe walking from the Tampa Theatre or performing arts center to the Fly Bar," said Abbey Dohring, VP at the Dohring Group in Tampa. "We want to change that."

Roughly 25 artists have painted scenes from an ice cream parlor to a hat shop on 4-foot by 8-foot pieces of plywood that will be hung over the ground-level windows of long-time vacant buildings between Polk and Tyler streets.

Artist Terry Klaaren is painting a three-story mural over the weekend on a vacant building next to Massey Park.

IMAGINING WHAT COULD BE

CREW, which is being assisted by the Uptown Council, Tampa Downtown Partnership and Urban Charrette, will also hang lights and redo landscaping.

"That portion of Franklin Street is emerging and starting to grow," said Lynda Remund, director of operations for the Tampa Downtown Partnership. "Right now it's kind of a blighted area. This will allow people to see what it can be. It'll add some vibrancy to the north end."

In 2005, the Downtown Partnership sponsored a similar project, called "Growing Pains." After three months, that artwork was auctioned off, Remund said.

ArtLoud is more of a grassroots effort, Remund said.

Kari Goetz, an Uptown Council member and audience development manager for the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center, said ArtLoud is the first step in creating a new personality for the area.



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Abbey Dohring, CREW committee chair for Downtown Rejuvenation and president and founder of Uptown Council, stands along Franklin Street.

"We're trying to increase pedestrian traffic," Goetz said. "It's not a very pretty walk right now. The artwork is amazing. Some of it is innovative, whimsical and clever."

Dohring, founder of the Uptown Council, said CREW will continue to work to rejuvenate northern downtown, which she defined as the area between Kennedy Boulevard and Interstate 275.

Next on CREW's list: a park.

"Our goal is to get Massey Park reopened," Dohring said. "There's a chain link fence around it. It's a big eyesore. All the property owners want the park opened."

CREW members talked to Mayor Pam Iorio several months ago about reopening the park, Dohring said. And the mayor has agreed it's a good idea. There was talk about erecting a new wrought iron fence.

Dohring, who jokingly refers to herself as an "uptown girl," said CREW also intends to rebrand north downtown as the Uptown.

"It's amazing what a group of women can do when they put their mind to it," she said.

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