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Downtown Harlingen Installs News Mural

Harlingen officials today unveiled a new mural entitled *Downtown Harlingen: Where the Past is Present*. The festivities took place in front of the mural, which is mounted on the west side of the historic Feldman's building at 116 W. Van Buren, in Downtown Harlingen.

The new mural is in seven sections, each of which features a historic Downtown building that has been repurposed to the needs of today's marketplace. The giant new mural (which measures approximately 10' x 112') was painted in full color by artist Brett Oberthaler of Weslaco, from historic black-and-white photographs. Downtown Harlingen commissioned the mural, with support in part by the Texas Historical Commission Texas Heritage Trails Program. A new *Map and Guide to Murals in Downtown Harlingen* also was distributed at the event.

Harlingen has a long mural tradition, with works from the 1940s and 50s still on display. Today, more than 20 larger-than-life-size works brighten the streets of Downtown Harlingen and decorate walls inside businesses. Most portray aspects of Valley history and culture. As Harlingen Mayor Chris Boswell explained, this new mural shows "how historic buildings serve as community assets and create a strong sense of place when preserved and adapted to a new uses." Boswell noted that those who participate in Downtown Harlingen walking tours learn that "pretty much everywhere you see a parking lot in the city center there used to be a building." He further explained that "having

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lost so many of our unique and iconic buildings over the years makes it even more important that we work to preserve and adapt those that remain.”

The seven buildings featured in the new mural include the Rialto (101 W. Jackson), one of Harlingen’s first movie theatres, and now a popular reception hall for quinceañeras, weddings, and special events. The mural also shows an early view of the Harlingen National Bank building that now serves as the offices of the Harlingen Housing Authority (219 E. Jackson). And, next to that, also owned by the Harlingen Housing Authority, is 209 E. Jackson, built nearly 100 years ago as Thompson Mortuary, and now home of pop artist Tony Schaub’s art studio, gallery, and residence.

On the far left side of the mural is 302 W. Jackson, built in 1916 as Ewing & Phillips Hardware, and now Cooley’s Classic Car Showroom. Second from the left is the 1930s Post Office building (221 E. Van Buren) which continues to be Harlingen’s Downtown Post Office and also has served as different banks over the years. The next section shows the popular Diana Shop at 115 E. Jackson in the mid-century, with its iconic “D” in the terrazzo entryway. Many subsequent businesses, such as D’Arte Centre Gallery, its current occupant, have used that fanciful “D” to advantage.

The centerpiece of the mural is a 1930s view of the historic Reese-Wil-Mond Hotel (202 S. First Street). This five-story building has been renovated and enjoys new life as The Reese mixed-used development.

For more information about murals in Downtown Harlingen, contact Cheryl LaBerge, Downtown Manager, at (956) 216-4910 or visit www.downtownharlingen.com.

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