

Library finds view of world on ceiling

By April Harper
Journal Staff Writer

Students were pretending to read and check out books, but were really carefully watching the subtle brush strokes that created a myriad of scenes on the ceiling.

Lipscomb Elementary is getting somewhat of a facelift, said librarian Loyce Hooker as she watched the delicate clouds and mountains being painted on the ceiling by Nashville artist Mike Cooper.

"We had wanted to bring the mural that we had at the old school here," she explained, "but it was too large and we couldn't find a wall big enough so it was destroyed with the building."

Hooker says she always wanted to have another mural and never gave up the hope that she would get another one some day.

"I read about Mike and his mural work in a newspaper article some



Nashville artist Mike Cooper paints a mural along the ceiling at Lipscomb Elementary while students (l-r) Jason Webb, Cliff Coyne and Jason Ford don hardhats and watch. Cooper and librarian Loyce Hooker pour over book and magazines looking for just the right scenes for the work of art.

time ago, but we didn't really have the money at the time so I saved the article until we were ready. We checked out some of the other things he had done and then we hired him."

Hooker says the goal was to have a mural that felt as though you were looking out on the highest mountain. So mountains became the featured element. "And we wanted maybe

some animals and a waterfall," she added.

The veteran librarian says instead of closing the library while the work was in progress they went a step further to make it educational for the students. "We were able to get some hard hats and the children can come in and watch," she said.

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Hooker also encourages students to sit at a table full of paper and crayons and draw along with Cooper.

"They love to draw and color the pictures of the mural," she added.

After spending many hours researching how the mural would look using many types of books and magazines she spread them out on a table and the work began.

"We used American landscape books, National Geographic magazines and some original artwork. We even used a page from a J. Crew clothing catalog," she said.

Cooper, a graduate of Memphis State University, began his career as a contractor in an interior decorating business designing office interiors..

"But ever since I was a little kid painting has been my hobby," said Cooper. While it may be hard for people to draw something small and then visualize it to scale, Cooper says it's second nature. "I guess I see it in my mind and then I see it fitting on the wall," he added.

Working from back to front Cooper used a roller to paint the mountains and says he will embellish by adding trees and animals as he goes along.

Cooper, who does all the color mixing himself, says he uses a standard latex paint that will last "just about forever".

The five day project is a normal job for Cooper. "I did a huge 30 by 100 foot building wall for the Dollar General Headquarters and it took me about three months to complete," he said.

"I usually work alone but sometimes my wife helps me. She paints great grass," he said smiling.

In addition to residential art work, Cooper paints faux finishes, trompe l'oeil and does marbleizing.

He has also done a mural for Franklin Road Academy and is the designer of the walls at Nashville's Hard Rock Cafe, although he did not do the painting on that project.

"This has been a fun project. I've been able to answer some questions from the kids and it's been great."