

**THE FAIREST
OF THEM
ALL—**

A mural being painted on a building, located on the block of Church Street between 6th and 7th avenues, will depict the facade of a stately Victorian structure.

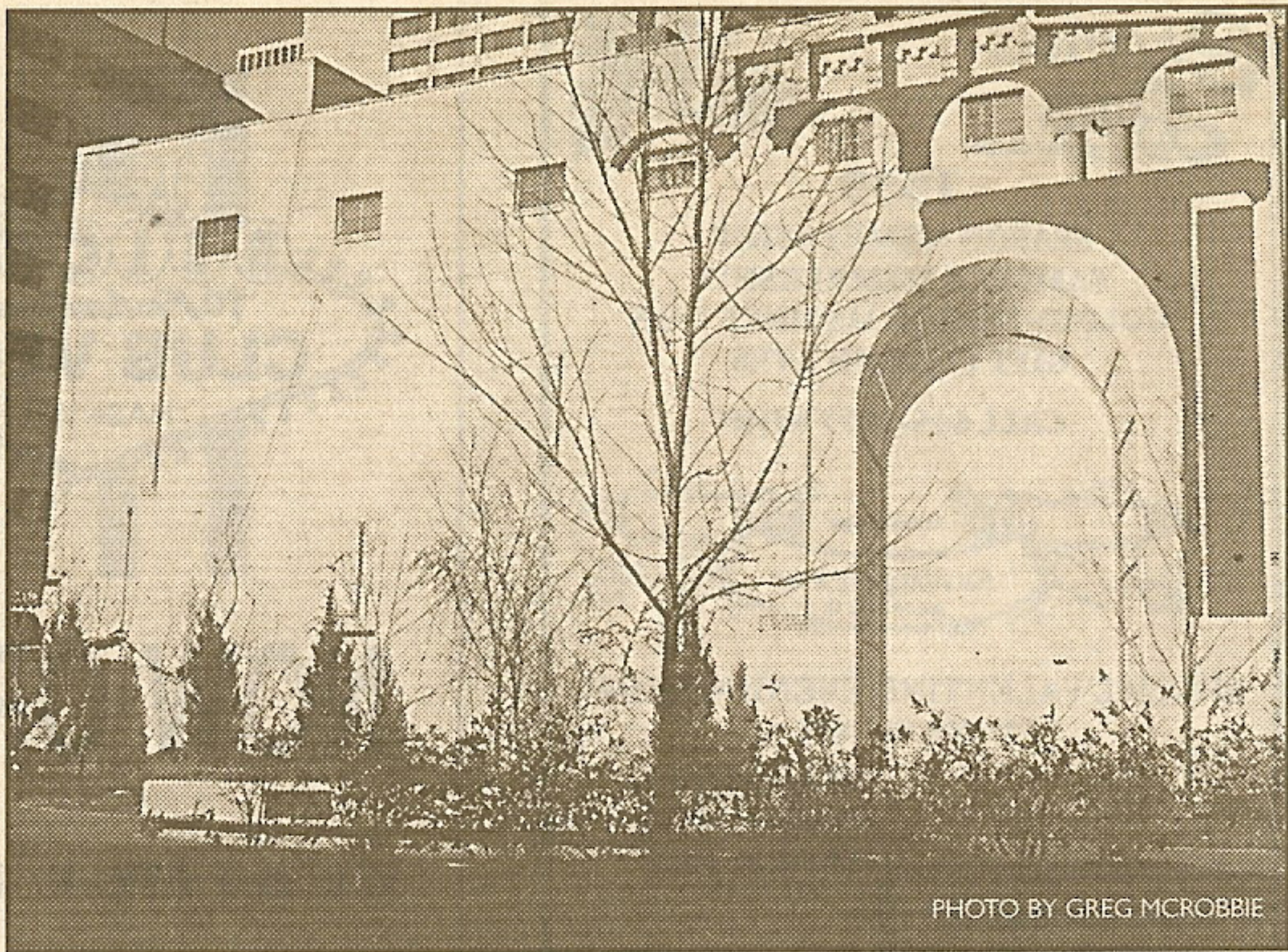


PHOTO BY GREG MCROBBIE

Mural, Mural On the Wall

Downtown Pocket Park Getting Artsy Addition

BY NATALIA MIELCZAREK

WHAT TODAY APPEARS TO BE A huge canvas on the side of a building facing Church Street — on which Michael Cooper is painting a massive mural — a few weeks ago was only one of many blank walls Downtown.

Very soon, the side of the old building will depict the facade of a stately Victorian structure, what Downtown officials are hoping will be a perfect backdrop to the Church Street pocket park.

When Ronny Greer and Dwight Work purchased what they would call The Work and Greer Building, the wall Cooper is painting was blocked by other buildings. Then a fire broke out.

"When the other buildings [located on the block of Church Street between 6th and 7th avenues] were taken down, this wall was exposed to [what would eventually be] the park," says Greer. Work and Greer wanted to enhance the plain wall — and they thought a mural would do the trick.

The building owners contacted many local agencies and businesses. From that point, the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce and its sister operation, the Nashville Downtown Partnership (NDP), stepped forward to coordinate the effort. According to Sara Miller, the manager of member relations at the NDP, the mural and its design were the outcomes of a fruitful collaboration of several organizations.

A committee comprised of the building's owners, the NDP and representatives of various Downtown businesses and agencies provided the all-private financial support for the project.

"We called local artists and got five to six proposals," Miller explains. "Then we narrowed it down to two. We met with both of them individually and chose Michael Cooper." At that point, Cooper proposed the design of the mural. The committee liked what it saw.

In early December, Cooper officially began his efforts as a hydraulic lift hoisted the artist 45 feet into the air. From the top of the building he started painting his mural, which he hopes "will make folks look a couple of times before they can say, 'I can see it now.'"

What will the finished product look like? Only a few people know the answer. What is known is that Cooper is using a special painting technique of trompe l'oeil (i.e., "to fool the eye") in order to create a sense of illusion and surprise.

"It's not a piece of work where I want to make a statement," says Cooper. Rather, his aim is to provoke passers-by to wonder whether what they see has been painted on or has been an actual part of the wall for years.

Jack Wood, chairman of NDP, hopes that the Church Street mural will start a new tradition in Nashville. He thinks that its success depends highly on the general public's attitude.

Cooper says that the reaction of Downtowners so far has been very encouraging. While he works daily on the wall, he hears comments, questions, pointers — and an occasional catcall. "Sometimes I'm 40 feet up and they yell at me."

But neither negative comments, rain nor cold weather are going to discontinue the work. If the weather is accommodating, Cooper expects to be finished in two to three weeks.

"I'm having a blast," Cooper says. ■

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