

Wyland's Gift to Key Largo - Whaling Wall #95

Story by Rachel R. Peine; Photos by Rich Peine

For 12 days in February, the median at MM 99.2 was transformed into an environmental education showcase. It was a "happening" - people gathered to watch and participate as mural artist Wyland created his 95th Whaling Wall - a mural on all four sides of the four-story building in the middle of the road. The party included a painting studio for kids, a gallery of Wyland's work, and a display from his environmental education foundation.

We asked Wyland why he chose this location for his last mural in the United States. He explained, "I've been looking at this wall a long time. I met the artist who did it the first time in 1984 when he did it, and I was very sad to see it disappear. It had soul. I knew I wanted to do one down here - you know I live in Islamorada now; this is my home. This is the most prominent wall in south Florida. I wanted to take it further and do a 360-degree view of all the beauty down here. Now I want to do the best mural I've done. I've done 94 so far; this is my last one in America."

If you go to Wyland's website, www.wyland.com, you'll see this quote explaining his philosophy:

"I first started painting whales and dolphins because I wanted to show their grace and beauty and maybe do something to help save them. I've personally grown to see a much larger picture, to save the whales is great... but if we can't save the oceans, we're not going to be able to save the whales and I'm driven by a dream that yet unborn

children will be able to see a great whale swimming free."

"I decided after I finished the first mural that I would complete 100 walls throughout the world by the year 2011 to raise public awareness not only for the great whales, but all life in the sea."

While the Wyland caravan was working on the building, the activity never stopped within the compound. Every morning Wyland put up a large white mini-wall, and brought in



Chris Ludeke of Key Largo loves hammerhead Sharks. Local students and children were welcomed to come to the site to participate in painting their own sea creatures.

kids from the local schools, giving them hands-on experience in painting and conservation. When we stopped by, Teacher Christine Ledwith's 4th grade class from the Island Christian School were painting fish, sharks, octopi, and rays. Ms. Ledwith is hoping the kids will remember they got to meet a famous artist and see him painting. "Every time they see that wall, they'll say, 'I saw him paint that wall'." Skylar DeMoss from Tavernier painted an orange fish. She said, "I think it's cool." Tommy

Lindholm from Tavernier mused, "I never painted a lot of stuff under water before". Chris Ludeke of Key Largo painted a large hammerhead shark. Chris has been painting sharks for about two years, and he thinks they're interesting because they're predators.

The Wyland foundation gives each teacher two books for a conservation curriculum: Hold Your Water and 68 Things You Can Do to Keep

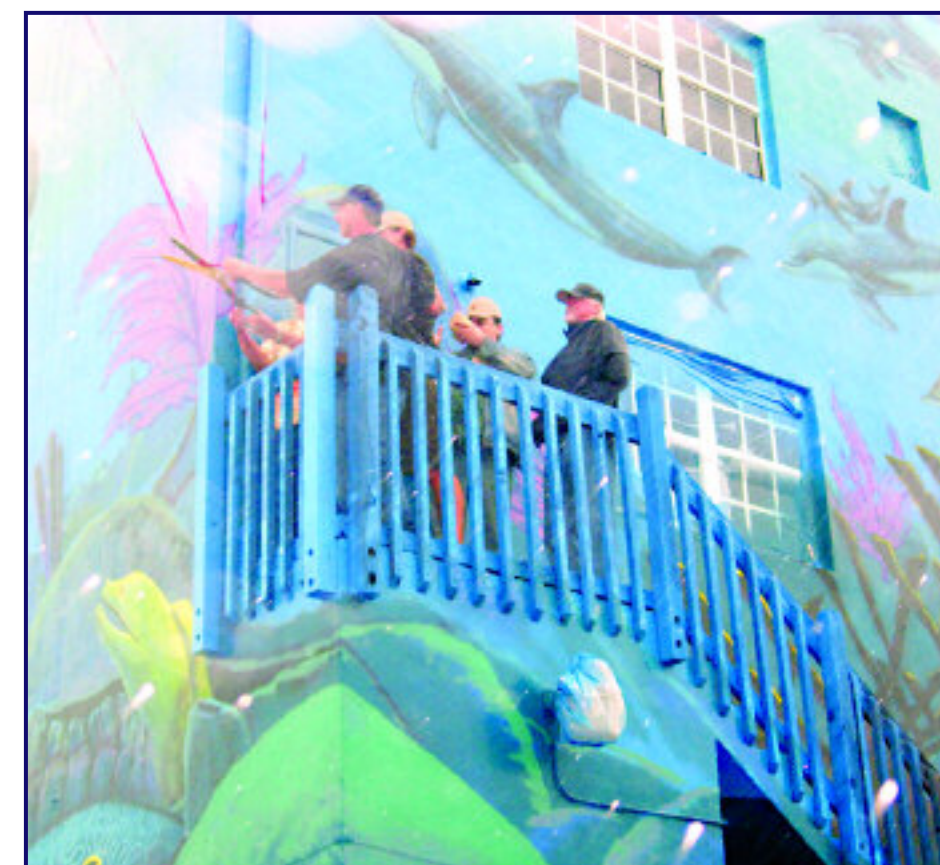
the Planet Blue. The kids also get wristbands that say "Every drop counts" to remind them of the purpose of the program. The Wyland website contains educational program materials for the Wyland Ocean Challenge - a conservation curriculum that teachers can download free, furthering Wyland's goal of having water conservation education programs in every classroom.

In addition to members of the Foundation who travel with Wyland to create the Whaling Wall, volunteers do a

lot of the behind-the-scenes and setup work. Chris and Linda Kuebler from Danbury Connecticut took vacation time to work on the Whaling Wall in Key Largo. They met Wyland in New Jersey four years ago and became state reps for the foundation. Chris says, "Wyland's an addictive person. You meet him and make eye contact, and you'll do whatever he asks." The Kueblers worked on the East Coast Tour, cleaning up beaches in 15 states, and then they worked on the Whaling Wall project in New Bedford Mass. in '05.

Carly Grimes of Venice, Florida is 10 years old, and she's been designated a Wyland Foundation Youth Ambassador, after participating in five Whaling Wall Projects along with her mom, Lynn, who volunteers with the Foundation. The Foundation folks put in a lot of time to get the sites prepared and make sure supplies and personnel flow smoothly. Carly and her mom lived in a motor home on the site for the twelve days of the project as they talked to visitors, handed out literature, and asked people to join the Foundation. Kids can now join the Foundation as Junior Members for a \$1 donation, and they get a free screen saver when they sign up.

The next Whaling Wall is scheduled for Abu Dhabi, in the Persian Gulf. His final wall will be over two miles long, to be completed in preparation for the Beijing Olympics in 2008. He'll be joined by 100 children from countries around the world as partners in creating awareness of the connectedness of the world



ABOVE: On a raining Monday afternoon on February 12th Wyland cut the dedication ribbon accompanied by Arlo Guthrie, who was in town for the "Guthrie Family Heritage Tour".

BELOW: Teacher Christine Ledwith (left) receives books from Marty Earlebaugh of the Wyland Foundation.



through water.

I wonder what Mother Earth (or is it Mother Water) was saying when she sent a zillion gallons of the wet stuff was saying when she sent a zillion gallons of the wet stuff so we can see the wall 24 hours a day. The excitement and activity of the Wyland "happening" have moved on now, but his gift to Key Largo stands tall and proud, welcoming the world to the Keys, and reminding people to take care of the ocean and the creatures that live in it. I hope they get the message.

The wall is complete now,



The finished building sits in the median at MM 99.2 in Key Largo. If you are going south look for the beautiful rays swimming and going north take a look at the large Manatee.



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