

Unveiling of mural will reveal slice of Maryland, and Carroll County

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This week a bit of Baltimore, the Chesapeake Bay and Carroll County will have a place in the Maryland Police and Correctional Training Commission's Public Safety Education and Training Center, in Sykesville, with the dedication of a new mural at the center.

Dee Cunningham, of Windsor Mill, has created a mural depicting scenes to represent the cadets and staff who come to Sykesville from all across Maryland. The mural was unveiled today at the center, located on the Springfield Hospital Center's 4th Street.

"This has been a crazy journey, and I'm proud I painted this for you," she said at the Tuesday ceremony.

The 10-by-14-foot mural will add to existing pieces at the center to give the building more of a college feeling, according to Ray Franklin, executive assistant director of the center.

"We consider this as an institution for higher learning, and we want it to look like one," he said in an interview prior to the unveiling.

Cunningham, 32, runs an art business called Deelite Design (www.deelitedesign.com) and also recently participated in a public mural design in Frederick with renowned muralist William Cochran.

At one time, she taught art at Francis Scott Key High School, in Union Bridge, and had lived in Westminster. The Towson University alumna also studied art in Florence, Italy.

Cunningham said she is honored to have a mural in the state police center.

"My family has several public servants in the military, teachers and my father works for Motorola and installs 911 communication systems ... so there's a sense of pride," she said.

The center's decor committee raised funds to help pay for the mural, Franklin said, and no state money was involved.

The mural includes three panels of scenes of Maryland painted over an image of the state flag on canvas in a "trompe l'oeil" style — a technique that Cunningham said creates tricks of the eye, playing off of reflections of images in the room or sometimes creating a three-dimensional effect.

"Maybe if your space doesn't have an extra room, you can create an illusion that (a painting) goes into that space," she said.

Cunningham said interacting with people is what she truly enjoys about the creative process — whether it's hearing about their stories and family history or simply talking to them about their hopes for an art project.

She recalled one mural she painted for a family in Winfield, and how she learned not only about cattle, but also about the family history connected to a barn that dated to the 1800s. And she recalled how the mother was brought to tears when she saw the finished product — including an image of her daughter.

"That, to me, is more valuable than getting paid — although I do like to pay my bills," she said. "I can give this to people and they can have original art in their home."

Or in this case, original art in a public place.

Franklin said he hopes the mural will provide for the cadets and staff a lasting memory of the time spent at the center.

Proof, he said, should come at graduation time. Many people currently take photographs in front of an eagle statue at the center, he said, to represent the time spent there.

"I dare to say when the mural is complete, that will also become a common background for photographs," he said.

This story has been updated.