

Student mural celebrates loving teacher

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At the end of the school year, she'd go out and buy a new tube of lipstick, paint her lips bright red and kiss the Grade 8 graduates on the forehead on their way out.

That was teacher Christina Walters' tradition, "so they were left with a sign of love as they went off for their summer vacation," said her friend Jennifer O'Brien.

Now that moment is captured in a mural in the front foyer at Canadian Martyrs Catholic School, near Woodbine and O'Connor Aves.

Walters died in 2006 of stomach cancer. Her husband Vern Walters – who began with a fundraiser auctioning off her hat collection – set up an endowment fund for arts activities for the students at the school, where she taught for three years before retiring in 2005.

Their first project was the 21-metre mural that spans four walls. It was created and painted by almost all of the 350 students in the school – except those in kindergarten – and took four weeks to finish.

It will be officially unveiled tomorrow night.

"Staff absolutely loved her; students did too," said principal Luigi Pennacchio.

"At last year's graduation ceremony, all the students were asked to write valedictory speeches, and we chose the best one. About 80 per cent wrote about her."

The mural, which captures moments in history from aboriginals meeting eight Jesuit missionaries – the Canadian martyrs – to longhouses, to the school, where an image of Walters with her red lipstick moves to embrace a child.

"She was very generous and friendly, and humorous – one of those people who just doesn't think twice about helping you out, but seems to be enjoying herself at the same time," said Grade 4-5 teacher O'Brien, who last summer primed the school walls for the mural.

"She loved the arts – she wasn't an artist per se, but she just encouraged it and loved it," Vern Walters said of the reason behind the Christina Walters Endowment fund. He raised \$2,300 initially, from the hat auction, and now has more than \$20,000.

Inner City Angels, and arts education charity, Mariposa in the Schools, and the school's parent advisory council also provided funding.



Allycia Uccello, left, an Inner City Angels artist, and Canadian Martyrs Catholic School students Samantha Lee, above, and Diane Robles, below, finish a mural dedicated to teacher Christina Walters, who died of cancer.