

Mural debut highlights importance of equitable treatment and local icon's work to recognize the underprivileged

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BRISTOL – As a physical statement meant to signify Bristol's commitment to treating its residents and visitors with equality, inclusive action and respect for diversity, the MLK39 Mural on the side of the Primo Press building along Riverside Avenue was debuted Thursday.

A celebration with music, food and local artists was held in the New England Carousel Museum parking lot. In partnership with the Bristol Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services Department, Connecticut's RiseUP and the Bristol Arts and Culture Commission, Bristol was chosen as the site of one of 39 murals in the state inspired by the mission of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Each mural is set to honor a year of King's life.



Dean Wright | Staff From left to right, Bristol's MLK39 Mural features Dr. Martin Luther King, Maya Angelou and local icon, Barbara Hudson.

The mural features King, poet and civil rights activist Maya Angelou as well as the local Barbara Hudson. Hudson was recognized as executive director of the Amistad Foundation of the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford for many years. Speakers said she was nationally-recognized as a lecturer, art consultant and curator of African American art. She often volunteered with the Bristol Historical Society researching the city's Black neighborhoods to redefine its previously accepted history.

CT RiseUP Executive Director Matt Conway called the Bristol mural the 15th in the total 39 slated for creation across the state before introducing mural creator Micaela Levesque.

“This was a piece I really connected with and it was very meaningful to honor three people like Martin Luther King Jr., Maya Angelou and, of course, Barbara Hudson,” she said. “I found them all to be very powerful in their own way as I got to learn more about them.”

Bristol Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services Superintendent Josh Medeiros said he felt the mural defied expectation.

“Our country faces mounting civil rights crises, longstanding systemic racism, extremist movements and white supremacist agendas and a continued battle for equality and equal rights,” he continued. “As a community, we must each do our part in making positive change for our friends and our neighbors.”

Arts and Culture Commission Chair Walter Lewandoski said the organization wanted its city to have the “biggest slice of the pie” of art to increase the quality of life of its citizens.

As part of an application in September 2021, the Arts and Culture Commission sought to join a mural tour honoring King's legacy as part of the mural tour and was notified of acceptance a few weeks after. The commission created the MLK Steering Committee, overseen by Lindsay Vigue, from local stakeholders in the search of a mural artist, fundraising and overseeing concept designs. Around \$15,000 was raised in community donations and the Main Street Community Foundation helped kick off the fundraising efforts.

The mayor noted the mural would become part of the city's Arts and Culture District, slated to become the second such district in the state.

"It's a tremendous honor, and I'm a history buff, to see Barbara up there with the likes of Martin Luther King and Maya Angelou," said Bristol Mayor Jeff Caggiano. "You should all be very proud and I'm very proud of her, you and the City of Bristol."

Former Councilman and Primo Press Owner Scott Rosado thanked his staff, family and those who made the mural possible.

"The mural is a large colorful way to celebrate our hometown's diversity," he said before quoting Maya Angelou and speaking on the importance of art connecting with area residents. "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Joseph Hudson, Barbara Hudson's brother, shared the history of her life.

"Barbara had an uncanny ability to identify critical elements in individuals essential to revealing the Black experience. She had a profound interest in the plight of the underprivileged, especially African Americans," he said. "She made it her lifelong work to research, publicize and promote accomplishments of the underprivileged, especially in art, literature and music."