

New app helps tourist locate & learn about Silverton's murals

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One of Silverton's many murals, which visitors can admire as a part of a walking tour. Brooke Jackson-Glidden / Statesman Journal File

A new iPhone app curiously developed in Galveston, Texas, provides a nice tool for Silverton tourists.

The free app is called "Silverton Mural Society," and it provides an electronic tour guide to the town's extensive mural displays, complete with a bit of history behind each work and a map that locates each one.

The electronic guide is the work of a cardiologist, Francis "Chip" Uricchio, whose sister, Ellen Snow, is a Silverton Mural Society member and a strong advocate of the city's adornments, their history and the local heritage they provide.

Uricchio learned how to develop apps as a hobby. He combined what he learned with his sister's enthusiasm for her hometown. The final product was approved and released by Apple earlier this month.

"I have visited Silverton but I have not seen the murals," Uricchio said. "My sister, Ellen Snow, is quite proud of her town. One day, when she was talking about the town, I had the idea of combining my interest in programming with the need to help the Mural Society promote murals in the town."

It was not a simple process; there were drafts and refinements along the way, adding codes, functionality and even a voice option. But the painstaking work paid off with a nifty final product.

Uricchio's hobby has its roots in simple YouTube videos that he watched a few years back, videos posted by a high school student.

"My regular job is a cardiologist, but I program on the side because it is interesting to me," Uricchio said. "I taught myself how to code on the Internet. There is a young man named Lucas Derraugh who published a series of programming tutorials on YouTube while he was in high school. I used these tutorials to teach myself how to code."

"Lucas is now a college student at Cornell. Despite only being in high school, his tutorials were excellent. He is really a very good teacher. It struck me as humorous that the man in his 50s would be taught by a high school student."

Uricchio said he continues to follow Derraugh via Twitter and is interested to see where his life's path takes him.

He's equally interested and hopeful of seeing the app help Silverton visitors and locals alike locate and learn more about the town's uniquely prolific civic artwork.

"It is my hope that visitors to Silverton can take a self-guided tour and learn about the history of the murals and the artists that painted them," he said.

To that end, Uricchio furnished the app with a paragraph on subject matter addressed by each mural, when it was painted and the name of the artist. Additionally, there is a map outlining the location of each mural which can provide directions from wherever the user might be.

Snow is delighted, especially with the possibilities of how that new tool can help kindle pride and ultimately preserve this part of Silverton's heritage. She recalled how longtime mural advocate Vince Till would provide tours for local school kids with that same aim.

That aim remains today, and this new tool created by her brother in his spare time has become a warm addition to that quest.

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A new iPhone app -- "Silverton Mural Society" -- designed by Chip Uricchio, a Galveston, Texas, cardiologist, assists tourists in Silverton with information about the local murals. JUSTIN MUCH | Stayton Mail