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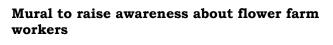
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September 09, 2015 - A mural designed to appeal to both the eye and the conscience is now being enjoyed by folks driving their cars and riding their horses along Addison Township's northern border.

Giant blue flowers, modeled after poppies, and a humming bird adorn the large barn at 3401 Jonathan Rd., north of Oakwood Rd. and just west of Hosner Rd.

Rita Patel, an artist living in Rochester, spent approximately 90 hours, beginning July 16, painting the massive mural, which measures 70 feet by 12 feet.

"I am pleased with it," she said. "I'm Patel (click for larger version) really, really happy with all the positive public reaction and support that I've gotten throughout the process. I've never done a piece outside, so there's been interest and comments and thoughts and questions (from passersby). All that energy has been great."

The mural includes a quote from the late Irish poet/author John O'Donohue -"As the outer light unveils the magic of landscape, the inner light of the soul awakens the undiscovered territories that are there."

Patel was commissioned to do the mural by the barn's owners, John and Lisa

She painted it to raise awareness about the challenges faced by female workers on flower farms in Ethiopia.

The African nation is the fourth largest supplier of flowers to the world market, according to the Ethiopian Horticulture Producer Exporters Association (EHPEA).

"Flowers are beautiful," Patel said. "We all love flowers. They're uplifting. But we don't really think about how we get them."

Patel is hoping her mural will promote and raise funds for the "Empowering the Source" project, which the EHPEA is a partner in.

The project is designed to address the needs and concerns of female flower farm workers by promoting their health and well-being, promoting gender sensitive management, and lobbying farms and other stakeholders to address sexual harassment and gender-based violence.



This mural depicting blue flowers and a humming bird can be seen on the side of a barn located at 3401 Jonathan Rd. Photo provided. (click for larger version)

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"Most of the people who work on flower farms are women," Patel explained.

More than 85 percent of the workforce in the Ethiopian floriculture industry are women and 88 percent of those workers are in the 18-30 age range, according to the EHPEA. Sixty percent of the women are single and 62 percent are enrolled in elementary education only.

All of these factors make them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Patel views herself as a "social artist."

"I'm using art as a way to engage the community and individuals (in a conversation about) a social cause," Patel explained.

Patel always tries to make her work "as inviting and as beautiful as possible," so it gives people pause and creates an opportunity for them to "see things differently."

To learn more about Patel and her work, please visit www.ritapatel.com

CJ Carnacchio is editor for The Oxford Leader. He lives in the Village of Oxford with his wife Connie and daughter Larissa. When he's not busy working on the newspaper, he enjoys cigars/pipes, Martinis/Scotch, hunting and fishing.

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