



Neema Pickett, left, and Ndidiamaka Okpareke, right, view the mural at WESST Enterprise Center.



Jonathan Reid takes a photo of his daughter Alyssa Begay with her mom Alberta Field in front of the mural. His daughter is portrayed in at WESST Enterprise Center on Thursday.



Jodie Herrera smiles during the ceremony of the unveiling her mural at WESST Enterprise Center.

'A beautiful full circle'

WESST unveils Jodie Herrera mural at its enterprise center

BY CARL KNAUF
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Beautiful and meaningful art can mesmerize a person into appreciation, but it can also offer a relation or influence different paths to pursue. The new mural inside the WESST Enterprise Center is there to help everyone's talents bloom.

On Thursday, the 170-story, 408-square-foot mural was unveiled to the public. The "Beyond the Living Wall" mural by New Mexico artist Jodie Herrera stretches from ground to clearing in the building's atrium, featuring portraits of three resilient businesswomen in the state — Carmen Bolivar, Ndidiamaka Okpareke and Alyssa Begay — all whom were present at the event.

Yini Wang, development officer at WESST, explained the project came to be by bittersweet chance. The infrastructure behind the living wall in the building's atrium broke and the plants were replaced by a white wall.

"We support pretty much everything. ... Maybe we can just do a mural that's inspiring because we support local artists," Wang said about how the team wanted to approach the blank canvas.

The amount of responses to the company's request for proposal were sentimental.

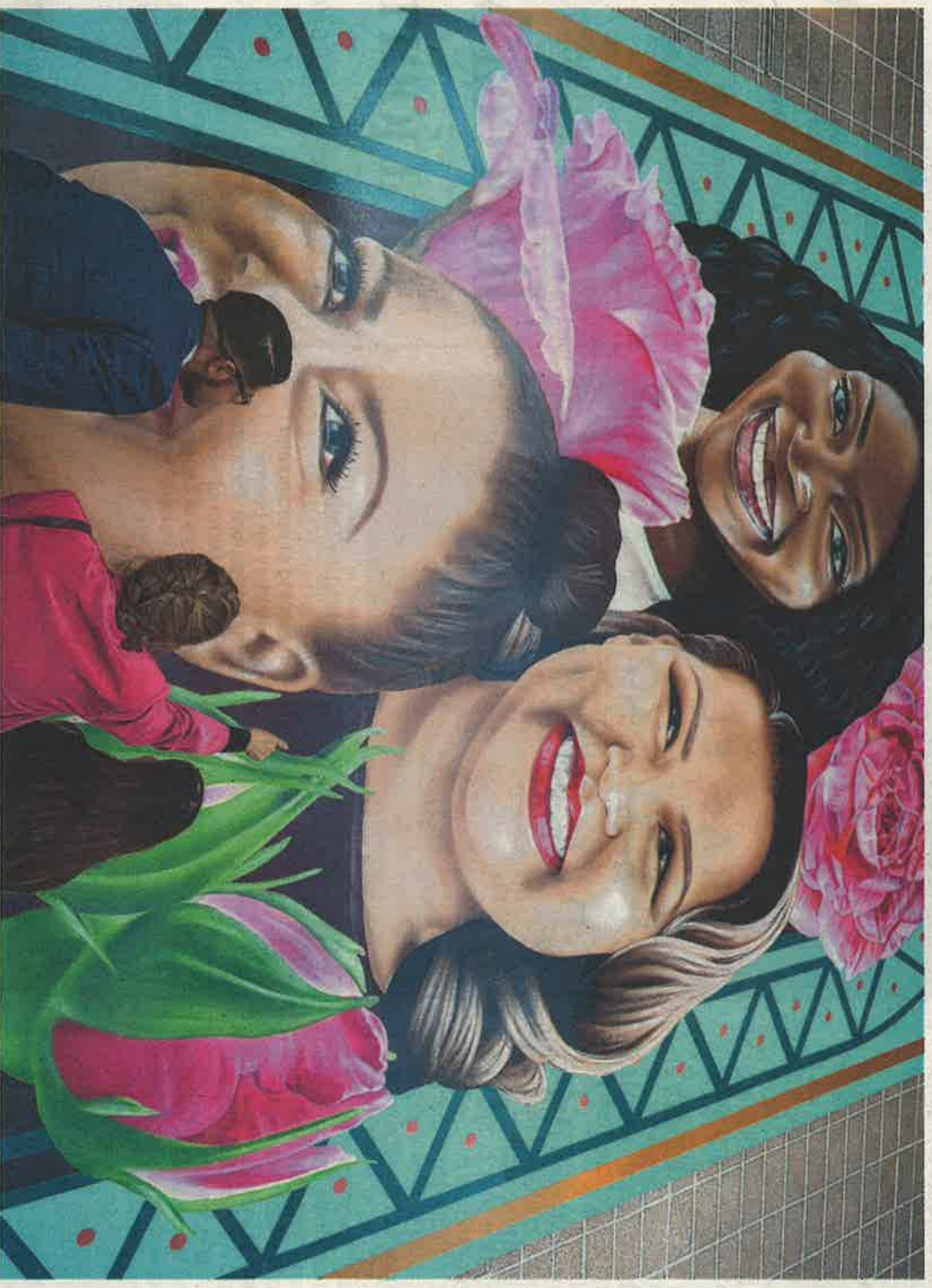
Wang said, "All the people who have a good heart, do the good things for the community ... we help them and they come back we believe."

WESST is a nonprofit that supports budding entrepreneurs in New Mexico. Since 1989, it has offered a system that includes a variety of consulting and training services to help women, people of color, and low-wealth and underserved individuals create and sustain a multitude of businesses.

Wang explained, "Sometimes people come in with different ideas and they just want to be an entrepreneur and have 10 different ideas ... we help them with those ideas."

Cassandra Sambrano, director of marketing communications at WESST, added, "We have to make sure that people have the building blocks to remove the barriers that are presented to them in general in order to make viable businesses."

All three women in the mural were WESST clients. Bolivar ran a bridal and



Visitors view the "Beyond the Living Wall" mural at WESST in Albuquerque. New Mexico-based muralist Jodie Herrera designed and painted the mural portraying three women business owners and WESST clients, Ndidiamaka Okpareke of Rio Rancho, Alyssa Begay of Farmington, and Carmen Bolivar of Albuquerque.



Ribbon cutting and ceremony during the unveiling of the "Beyond the Living Wall" mural at WESST Enterprise Center on Thursday.

event company until the pandemic unfortunately led to the closure of her business. She did not let that deter her entrepreneurial spirit, however, as she recovered and opened a food truck.

Okpareke is the president and owner of Olive Tree Pharmacy, an independent compounding pharmacy designed to branch away from larger corporations in the

industry and offer a better and more customized form of care.

Begay, who is based in Farmington and a member of the Navajo Nation, fulfilled her dream to open a reality company, and is now a consultant for WESST.

"Small businesses are the way our economy grows and overall supports community, so that's kind of where our overarching theme is,"

WESST

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Learn more about nonprofit's mission and services at wesst.org

Sambrano said.

Herrera, who was also a WESST client shared that her time with the nonprofit was "a great experience."

She said, "I thought it was just such a beautiful full circle working with them in the past to be able to help along with my art career, and then being able to contribute to their headquarters, make something beautiful and just commemorate what they do."

Herrera was able to pursue and create her dream project "Women Across Borders" with the help of WESST's guidance, and her portfolio keeps expanding as her talents gain exposure on national and global levels.

"I love the fact that they decided to add to the art

economy," Herrera said, "... creating something that really showcased the diversity that they work with there and making sure it was a platform for minority women."

Herrera said she worked in peace during the quiet hours of the night and the mural took about a month to complete.

She added her signature graphics to the piece, but the three faces of the women are vibrantly highlighted. Their joyous and powerful expressions stagger upward, emerging from open pedals at the base. The flower eventually reaches full bloom, signifying growth and showcasing a connection of individuality.

Though Herrera didn't know the other entrepreneurs personally before creating the piece, she said featuring Bolivar, Okpareke and Begay "was really intentional."

"It's representing people that ... have been really amazing success stories, and that's what I wanted," she said.