

Painting with people

Artist's project honors grandfather's memory

By KATY GANZ

Staff Writer

His grandfather's last moments have haunted John William Duncan Feight's whole life.

Feight's grandfather, John Henry Duncan Feight, was a doctor in Killbuck and was killed in a car accident while making house calls.

"I was told he died with a smile on his face," Feight said.

But it would be more than 24 years before the memory of his grandfather would force Feight to change his life.

A Killbuck native, Feight grew up to be an artist. In his 30s he was selling art in Paris.

"I'm wondering what am I doing," he said. "I'm not doing anything for anybody. I'm not helping anybody."

He returned to the United States and promised to start visiting hospitals.

"I went there on Sunday nights and discovered people staring at blank walls," he said. "But, if we put art in front of people who are ill, and even dying, it might comfort their ills and ease their pains."

In 1984 Feight started the nonprofit, The Foundation for Hospital Arts. The organization has produced more than 30,000 paintings.



Submitted photo
The Killbuck "A" Team traveled to Atlanta to paint at the Atlanta Shelter for Homeless Men, founded by John and Linda Feight 16 years ago. Pictured with The Daily Record are John Feight, "Caretaker Gary," Linda Feight, Ann Stotler, Lou Henri Baker, Sandy Bergoon and Jane Voltz.

"On a daily basis it's probably over 2.5-3 million people that go by the artwork," Feight said. "It's not your normal environment. It's not a museum or a gallery. It's a place where healing should be soft and beautiful, and not hard and blank."

At first, Feight painted murals. But when working on his second mural he heard a 4-year-old girl say, "I want to paint." He turned

around and the girl was severely burned. That's when Feight's art changed. Rather than painting for people, he allowed people to paint with him.

"I went to Paris because I thought art was important," he said. "I discovered in hospitals that people are important."

Major sports teams, including the Seattle Seahawks and the Indiana Pacers, have

all painted with Feight, said Feight's sister, Lou Henry Baker

Sixteen years ago the nonprofit discovered another mission as Feight took the project outside the hospitals and into a homeless shelter in Atlanta.

Every Saturday, Feight shows up to paint, "with the

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hope that these men who are going through drug rehab and who are homeless can get some sense of value by helping others," he said.

The paintings, when they are finished, will be hung in hospitals around the world.

One man told Feight that the thought of painting on Saturdays helps calm his cravings.

"Patient after patient loves the idea that they can do something and also leave something behind they had their hands on," Feight said.

Friends and family from Ohio are regular Saturday visitors.

"I've very proud of where I came from," Feight said. "I like being connected back to where I came from."

A recent group from Killbuck including Sandy Bergoon, Jane Voltz and Lou Hunri Baker, painted with the shelter's residents.

It gave Baker a better understanding of why her brother loves what he does.

"It was so humbling for us to get to do that," Baker said.

Feight knows this is the closest he can come to being a caregiver and helping others.

"My grandfather had a smile on his face for a reason and I think I've found that reason," he said.