

DAILY PRESS

DESERT DISPATCH

Barstow, city of murals

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Ed Bauer and Slim Slanton opened a Chevrolet dealership in the heart of Barstow in the late 1920s, but their business had run its course fewer than 10 years later.

Conversion of the building came around 1937. Display windows were removed. Walls were modified. The floor was paved over, and 12 gasoline pumps were installed inside the building. Outside, a mural was painted that depicted Route 66.

So began the 34-year era of the Standard Stations Inc. establishment, once the largest covered gas station in California.

Situated on the northwest corner of what is now Main Street and First Avenue — just south of the iron bridge that opened to traffic on April 26, 1930 — the Standard station offered travelers some respite from the scorching summer sun, and business boomed in the pre-interstate age.

Through the 1940s, the intersection where Route 66-91 angled north into Route 91-466 toward Las Vegas was among the most traveled in the country. As such, the station was the busiest in Standard Oil's chain despite being one of five in that part of town.

The station was demolished in 1971, 14 years after the arrival of Interstates 15 and 40, to make way for a donut shop. But history has a knack for recovering what we believe is lost — especially in Barstow.

Kathy Fierro, a master muralist with Main Street Murals, recently finished the rendering for a \$5,000 mural of the Standard station. She told me she worked with local historian Steven Smith to research the written and pictorial history of the station to create her design.

What resulted was a split reproduction that both honors the business and tracks Barstow's progression through two decades of the 20th century.

The mural's left side depicts the station in the cinematic black and white of the 1930s. The right side, meanwhile, shows it and other storefronts with the Technicolor brilliance of the 1950s.

The Barstow City Council sure seemed to appreciate Fierro's work. They unanimously approved the rendering Tuesday, and Mayor Pro Tem Carmen Hernandez, who represents District 4, offered her congratulations.

"That station was open when I came (in 1965)," Hernandez told Fierro, "and you've done an excellent job reproducing it."

With the Council's blessing secured, the 8-by-19-foot mural will soon join 26 others on or near Main Street.

Where exactly, you ask? On the west-facing wall of Starlight Donuts, the Standard station's former site. A fitting location to say the least.

Jane Laraman-Brockhurst, director of Main Street Murals and the Desert Discovery Center, called the location "really significant for Barstow," telling me that the mural honors not only Standard Oil's relationship with the city, but Route 66's, as well.

"It's a historic communication corridor, and it's one of the largest functioning Route 66 main streets," she said. "Many have been bypassed by freeways, so Barstow is really fortunate to still have a functioning part of Route 66."

Which is why the good folks at Main Street Murals, a nonprofit founded in 1997 by Juliette Tison, are so dedicated to preserving history and uniting a

community along the road. Those 26 murals represent a “walking gallery” that promotes Barstow's heritage.

The promotion works, by the way, attracting visitors from around the world.

“Just the other day we had visitors from New Zealand and Asia in addition to local visitors,” Laraman-Brockhurst said. “So Route 66 is really significant, and it’s great to have a public gallery that’s open 24/7 for locals and tourists.”

Fierro, who has had a hand in creating roughly half of Barstow’s murals, said she and a team of Main Street Murals artists will start preliminary work next week. When the time comes, though, she won’t paint directly onto the Starlight Donuts wall.

Rather, she will project old photographs of the Standard station onto a separate wall and use those projections to craft the mural. Once it’s finished in a few months, the team will place the art onto the shop's wall.

And Barstow will be richer for it.

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