

'It's kind of an embarrassment'

'Nudity' in artwork concerns custodian

By Brian Martin
News-Tribune Reporter

A mural that has hung in Oglesby's U.S. Post Office lobby for more than 50 years has been covered after the custodian there complained about nudity in the work.

The painting, which depicts a battle between the Illinois Native Americans and the Pottawattomje tribe, has hung on the east wall of the post office since the building was completed in the 1940s.

But for the last two weeks, the picture has been covered by two sets of blinds. The artwork measures 13 feet wide by 7 feet high.

Standing under the large painting Tuesday afternoon, John Swartz, Oglesby postal custodian and Seatonville resident, pointed to two male Native Americans that he says are depicted with exposed genitalia. The work was uncovered for a short time Tuesday for a reporter.

"It's easily seen that what you are looking at there is uncircumcised males," Swartz said. Customers have not complained, he said, but some are bothered by the work.

"The children when they look up there — it's kind of an embarrassment," he said. Most objectionable to Swartz are a man lying on his back near the lower, right-hand corner and a man on horseback at the bottom, center of the work.

Those two figures have a loincloth or G-string type garment with leaves covering parts of their bodies. But Swartz said the leaves hide little.

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Oglesby residents (from left) Anita Pope and Shirley Garner take a look Tuesday at a mural in the lobby of the U.S. Post Office that was covered after a person complained of nude Native Americans. The work was uncovered briefly for a reporter.

Military planes crash near western Illinois

Art

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The buttocks of other males on horseback are partially exposed.

Native Americans living in the area in the early 18th century particularly those at war would be wearing more clothing, probably made of deerskin, Swartz said.

He tried to look at it through Swartz's eyes.

"I'm not an art critic. What I did was try to put myself in the place of the person who found it offensive," he said. "I guess everybody has their own standards."

Schwartz said a union grievance and a complaint filed with the post office failed to produce results. He has since appealed to the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

He wants the painting removed or additional clothes painted on the offending Native Americans.

But Matanic said the blinds will stay until a final determination is made.

"We haven't considered altering the painting in any way," he said. The work has been pre-

served while Matanic determines if it is listed on the National Historic Register.

"It will be covered for the time being, and we'll probably make some permanent determination at a later date," Matanic said.

The painting was done on canvas by Fay E. Davis of Chicago. The \$700 price tag was paid for by the Federal Works Agency in 1942.

The canvas is mounted on the wall and probably cannot be removed easily, said Roger Mahnich, Oglesby postmaster.

"It couldn't be taken down without probably destroying it," he said.

The painting was refurbished about five years ago for "a lot more than \$700," Mahnich said. The cost was not available.

throughout the state and I can say there is a great deal of enthusiasm among the hospital community," he said. "So I know the hospitals are really interested in building up this grass-roots effort."

Locally, hospital officials said efforts were under way to get the postcards mailed.

"(The IHA) went to a huge effort to do this," said Hartauer.

shuffle.

Specifically, the IHA doesn't want the state to make up the difference by hitting hospitals harder.

The postcard sent out to the state's 200-plus hospitals explains the IHA position and reads, in part, "Increasing the tax on our patients or reducing my hospital's (Medicaid reimbursement) is not the answer. The way to solve this is to have more hospitals in border states who serve Illinois patients."

They wouldn't be running around like that," he said.

Les Matanic, manager of post office operations for the central Illinois district, said he traveled to Oglesby to view the painting before ordering it covered.

"The individual who did complain found it was offensive on several grounds, one of which was nudity or perceived nudity," he said. Although Matanic said he did not find the painting offensive, he said.

"It's not any different than what I see on TV," she said.

Shirley Garner, who came to the post office a short time later, agreed.

"I don't see anything wrong with it, no," she said. "I never paid any attention to it." She said all men in the picture have leaves covering the appropriate places.

the hospital some \$20,000 a year, staff said they were making every effort to get the postcards mailed out.

"We're very supportive (of the plan). It means everything to us. It's part of our future," said Katie Hartauer, director of community relations. "That's why in every way that we can help we will."

What's going to happen if there will be a hybrid program, I don't know," said Swartz.

Swartz said the IHA is planning a hybrid (partly Medicaid, partly state) program.

"(The Medicaid) issue is going to keep us here info July," he said.

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If the state doesn't have a plan in place by July 1, the first day of the new fiscal year, federal funds would be forfeited.

Mautino said he didn't think any one single plan would be approved to take the place of the current unpopular Medicaid assessment program.

Medicaid

FREESTIMATES

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