



ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

Artist Beth Threlfall: This year, painters might want to prime their poles a couple of days ahead of the event.

In Fernwood, heart and soul is transmuted into art on poles

Painting project designed to make the neighbourhood more livable

BILL CLEVERLEY
Times Colonist

It's a pole position that has Fernwood in the lead.

More Fernwood utility poles soon will be transformed into colourful works of art as the neighbourhood comes together for the Fernwood Pole Painting Project — an act of community reclamation that has taken root.

Painting the poles with colourful images of sunflowers and tulips and the like is developing into a neighbourhood tradition.

Artist Beth Threlfall got the ball rolling in 2008 after attending a lecture on neighbourhood livability.

"It was about how to do place-making and how to do gathering spots and how to make dismal corners more bright and cheery so people feel that it is a friendly place to be," she said.

"I left there feeling absolutely inspired and the first thing that I laid my eyes on were the telephone poles in front of my place."

B.C. Hydro gave permis-

sion to paint the poles in front of her house and the dominoes quickly began to fall.

"Then my neighbours were like: 'Hey, do ours!' Then the NRG [Neighbourhood Resource Group] stepped in and said, 'This is great. Why don't we do something bigger?'"

"Something bigger" got so big that last year hundreds of people showed up for the pole paint, she said.

Threlfall estimates that 130 poles were painted. Some people organized pole-painting block parties and dozens of poles have been painted since.

It's an idea is not limited to Fernwood, says Coun. Pam Madoff.

"People don't realize there was a little pocket of it in Rockland, too. So it's not just those hippies in Fernwood," Madoff said, adding she loves the initiative.

Madoff said the pole painting may become even more prevalent as of the end of this summer, as Hydro will no longer be allowing banners to be hung

from their poles.

This year, the Neighbourhood Resource Group is putting together pole-painting kits (with paints, sponges and wet-paint signs) that can be picked up the week before the May 26 pole paint at its office at 1313 Gladstone Ave.

A free stencil-making workshop will be presented on May 22, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., at the Fernwood Community Centre, 1240 Gladstone Ave.

Threlfall advised that painters might want to prime their poles a couple of days ahead of the event.

Last year, organizers prepped, numbered and assigned poles. This year, it will be up to the painters to find their own, Threlfall said.

And, it has to be remembered, not everyone shares the same artistic sensibilities. Some people prefer that the pole in front of their house not be decorated.

One homeowner has made it extremely clear that he does not want the pole in front of his house painted because he thinks that would lower his property's value.

"He's an older gentleman," Threlfall said. "He

goes for more of a clean look, as I like to describe it. He doesn't want the painting on the pole."

The painters will respect his views and advise anyone who feels the same to post a notice on a pole if it's not to be painted.

Unfortunately, Threlfall said, "clean" poles don't generally stay that way long.

"For us it's just not a solution because if it's a clean pole, the next week-end it will be tagged," she said.

Experience shows that combatting graffiti by blotting it out with a neutral coloured paint also doesn't work, she said.

"They're called buffers — people that go around and paint over taggers. They're called buffers. They can create just as much of a mess as a tagger can because they're usually just going around with a grey [spray-paint can].

"It's not like they're trying to match up paint to the environment," Threlfall said.

"They've got their industrial grey and they're slapping on their squares of grey, and it looks just as awful as anything else," bcleverley@timescolonist.com