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History of Civitas Branching

Susan Hunt
College of the Holy Cross

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Civitas Branching – A History of the Mosaic

Designed to represent the cooperation of members of the neighborhood and College community, the ceramic and glass tile mosaic depicts apple and pear trees with branches reaching toward each other, intermingling. The apple trees represent Holy Cross, its landscape once adorned with apple orchards; the pear trees represent the neighborhood where the fruit trees once grew in abundance. Four other panels provide beautifully imagined scenes set in the four seasons. A careful observer can also eye a number of hidden symbols incorporated into the design by the student and neighborhood designers including feathers to represent the Native Americans that once inhabited the area; hearts to symbolize the bonds of affection that bind us together; and mirrors to allow viewers to see themselves in their community.

The project was conceived by mosaicist Hillary Chisolm Sloate, who taught at the Worcester Art Museum and was a resident of College Hill. Sloate's intent was to create a mosaic to foster better relations between the College and its neighbors. Sloate partnered with Classics Professor Ellen Perry to develop a course in mosaics through the College's Center for Interdisciplinary and Special Studies as a community-based learning course. Through the course, students committed to weekly readings and assignments, a trip to the Worcester Art Museum to study ancient Roman mosaics, and journal entries to document the mosaic process and the techniques they learned, as well to note the camaraderie that formed between them and members of the community that participated.

Fourteen Holy Cross students and thirteen members of the College Hill community spent three and a half months meeting, planning, learning, studying, creating, and forming friendships. A plaque from 2003 commemorating the mosaic lists the following individuals as the mosaicists: Helen Alisch, Tangela Adams '04, Carla Brady, Rachel Bromage, Shauna Crehan '04, Officer John Dowd (Worcester Police Department), Evelyn Dunton, Germaine Fernandes, Lt. Tom Foley (Public Safety), Bernadette Foley '05, Kevin Gallagher '05, Christine Higham '06, Meagan Howe '06, Brooke Konecny '03, Kristel Kubart '04, Tom Lewis, Deanna Lucia, Jennifer Marcotte '05, Kate McGrail '04, Liam McRell '04, Jean Marie Paradis, Prof. Ellen Perry, Beth Provencher '05, Meghan Reilly '05, Sandra Roy, Debbie Siplas, Kate Siplas, Tim Sloate,* Lindsay Sumner '05, Lisa Villa and Elizabeth Wolanski.*

It was nearly 12 years ago, that Holy Cross students and neighbors gathered on Kendig Street at the now former College Hill Civic Association Building for the first dedication of the "Civitas Branching" mosaic. The association building now serves as Habitat for Humanity Metro West/Greater Worcester's first Veterans Build and is home to a veteran and his family. It was the repurposing of the building (donated through the generosity of the members of the College Hill Civic Association to Habitat for Humanity) that found the neighborhood and the College working together again -- this time to find a new home for the three-foot tall by 24-foot wide mosaic.

Members of Student Affairs, Physical Plant, the Cantor Art Gallery, and the Office of Government and Community Relations worked with neighbors and Habitat for Humanity to ensure the safe removal and storage of the mosaic. Subsequently, it was installed at its current accessible and welcoming location overlooking the Dinand Library plaza.

**Deceased.*