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## Art students aid downtown piano project

BY **JON FRANK** | APRIL 04, 2011 7:20 AM

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A group of University of Iowa students applied strips of blue painter's tape to a deep wooden-brown piano behind the UI Studio Arts Building on Sunday.

The five art students were decorating one of the pianos to be placed on sidewalks in downtown Iowa City. This piano will join at least two others — in front of M.C. Ginsberg, 110 E. Washington St., and hotelVetro, 201 S. Linn St. — as part of a project under the direction of local business owners Marc Moen and Mark Ginsberg.

"It's visual and sound therapy," said UI senior Eliezer Sotillo, who leads one of the groups designing the pianos. "It engages people to not only come up to the piano and play it, but at the same time, they can touch the artwork, which is very rare. You don't get to touch paintings, usually."

The public pianos were [first introduced](#) to downtown Iowa City in the summer of 2010 as part of a worldwide project, "Play Me, I'm Yours," started by British artist Luke Jerram in 2008. The pianos are open to the public from mid-morning to late evening during warmer months. Stephen West, the owner of West Music in Coralville, donated the instruments.

Initially, two pianos were installed. This spring, West said four more will be placed downtown. The pianos cost upwards of \$1,500 to purchase and maintain, West said.

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"It should enhance the [downtown] environment," he said. "It complements the Iowa City community very well."

Sotillo and the other members of the group stressed the importance of collaborating with one another to create a cohesive product. Joshua Cornelis, one of the students working on the piano, said they drew their inspiration from Keith Haring, a New York-based artist who used bold colors in

his work.

Sotillo is a native of Maracay, Venezuela, and he first became interested in the project after hearing a resident play a Ben Folds song on one of the downtown pianos.

“He drew a pretty big crowd, and then I started realizing that he wasn’t just playing a piano, he was playing a painted piano, which was even more interesting,” he said. “I really enjoy displaying work in a way where it’s not exclusive.”

Sotillo volunteered for the project when Lynne Lanning, an academic adviser for art students who helped put the project together, sought students to design the instruments.

Lanning said students collaborating is an “excellent idea.”

“Anytime you build bridges between the university community and the downtown community, it’s important,” she said.

The group plans to use anywhere from 20 to 30 different colors and will use spray paint and bucket paint. The group has a barrage of spray cans and roughly 39 gallons of bucket paint at their disposal, all of which the UI provided.

“We’re doing neons and abstracts because we thought it would be easy to collaborate on, and it would be attention-grabbing,” said UI sophomore Lily Allen-Duenas. “It’s kind of angular and organic.”

Lizzie Ginsberg, a student ambassador for the project, said the project helps keep students in the art program connected to the community.

“Sometimes, being out here at [Studio Arts], you don’t feel like you’re part of the campus,” the UI senior said. “So if I can provide any opportunity to connect the two, I want to try to do that.”

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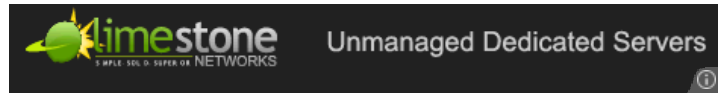
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