



'Paint the State' art featured in book

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The Montana Meth Project message adorned an outhouse, teepees, hay bales and the sides of livestock in last year's "Paint the State" art competition.

Now the works are featured in a new book.

A photo of a mural done by Townsend teen Alexa Audet, who was awarded the statewide grand prize, is the centerpiece of the 56-page book.

Her vibrant painting is of a mermaid contrasted with a jagged black hole containing the project's "Not Even Once" logo.

The painting is displayed on the side of the Townsend City Pool Building where she is a lifeguard. "Shattered hopes, dreams and all things imagined. With meth, it's never a pretty picture," the mural says.

The book also includes quotes from some of the more than 660 teens who entered the contest with artwork depicting the dangers of methamphetamine use in addition to community members impacted by the pieces.

"The number of teens that participated in this project, and the quality of the work they produced, really turned this into a true grassroots effort and one of the most successful public art projects ever executed," Montana Meth Project chairman Mike Gullede said.

More than \$300,000 in prize money was handed out to participants. Entries were judged by each county's commission, and Montana artist Russell Chatham chose the top winner Audet, who was awarded \$13,000.

According to Gullede, publisher of the Billings Gazette and vice president for publishing of Lee Enterprises, one of the main charges of the efforts is to "unsell meth."

The project was started by the Thomas and Stacey Siebel Foundation in 2005 with the goal of significantly reducing first-time use of methamphetamine by teens.

The latest onslaught of the project's provocative advertisements began in March. This third phase of ads includes saturation in television, radio and print ads in addition to billboards.

"The fact that so many kids saw value in the 'Not Even Once' message, and came up with their own ways of conveying that sentiment to their peers, shows just how important the anti-meth issue is to teens in the state. The book is a great memento of this one-of-a-kind project," Gullede said.

The book is free with a \$50 donation to the Montana Meth Project, which can be made online at <http://www.paintthestate.org/book.aspx>, or by calling toll free 1-888-366-6384.