

Sonny Franks started painting signs in 1969 as part of a summer high school job. Then, while a Clemson University sophomore, he opened Rainbow Graphics, a sign and screen-printing shop. He's been in the profession ever since.

Surely, you've seen Sonny's murals about town. Two images greet visitors to The Apothecary in Old Town. The butterfly mural at City Park, dedicated to former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, founder of the International Butterfly Trail, ranks as one of his favorites.

Other local murals include the Lilburn Tunnel Bridge on the Cofer Electric Building, his first commissioned piece for the city and the guitar that complements the "Let there be Songs to Fill the Air" wall at Music on Main Street. Now comes his most recent project: The Mark Twain mural on the wall of the City Park pavilion. It features this Twain quote:

"The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why."

"I heard that quote years ago and wanted to share it with the public," Franks said. "What better way than on a mural? My original concept was just the front wall, where I chose bright vibrant colors to correspond with the sheer joy of the silhouetted girl jumping.

"While measuring the wall, I began thinking about continuing it around the corner and painting a sky that juxtaposed the front sunrise with a moonrise and starry night," he continued. "I used all black silhouettes on the elements for a stark contrast and simplicity, so the quote became the primary feature."

It's been said that public art improves a community's quality of life. That it attracts visitors, draws people together and makes them feel good, said Mayor Johnny Crist, who commissioned Franks to paint the city's newest mural.

"Cities are more than streets and roads and fixing potholes," Crist said. "They are environments that draw people together and art is a huge part of that. It's how cities need to think."

Franks, our June Citizen of the Month, concurs. He's painted murals in other states and his work can be seen in local towns from Stone Mountain to Suwanee, Duluth to Smyrna and beyond.

"Obviously, I hope Lilburn keeps commissioning murals," he said, "but there are lots of ways to present public art. I really like Suwanee's SculpTour program, where the public votes on pieces the city buys for its permanent collection.

"Murals have become a major part of the urban landscape, and I'm involved with a group called the Walldogs who transform towns with historically-themed murals each year. Some of these can be seen on my website, www.signcreations.net, along with signs and graphics I've created over the years."