

# A water tank for a

# canvas

How do you beautify your community and bring a thumbs-up response from all those who reside there? Hire Donna and Rod Hennig, MuralDesign, to paint your local water tank or tower. This husband-and-wife business thrives on their individual talents—Rod, the business manager and “go-getter,” and Donna, the artist for 50 tanks since 1986.

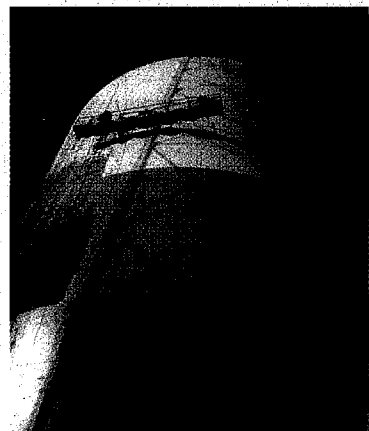
What do you paint on a water tank to beautify an otherwise large eyesore in the community? Donna says they usually paint trees. Their goal is to camouflage the tank by painting it to blend into the surroundings. If there are trees around the tank, the artists simply add to the forest with their art. If it is a new, barren development that will take 10 to 15 years for the trees to reach some stature, the painted water tank can serve as a mini-forest forecasting the future.

Donna sketches out what will be painted on a tank, imagining the gray, overcast days in their home in Renton, Wash., near Seattle, or the blue skies of their snowbird home in Arizona. She uses the worst weather for her palette. “You don’t want a bright blue sky in Seattle. It wouldn’t work.” The point is to camouflage the tank so that it blends into the landscape.

One tank they painted in Alaska was so unobtrusive that many people driving by were unaware of the tank’s presence; however, next summer when

people drive by the tank at the fairgrounds in Lynden, Wash., it will be noticed. Donna has been commissioned to create a background with Mt. Baker, hot air balloons, strawberry fields, Clydesdale horses, and John Deere tractors.

Looking back on the myriad of designs for tanks over the years,



Donna is especially fond of a California tank that showcased 17 or 18 varieties of foliage, and a tank in Washington showing a pasture scene with cows.

She also likes the palm trees on a couple of tanks in a ghetto area of Southern California. She calls them her “drive-by shout-outs” because as people drove by, they gave the painters a thumbs-up and shouted “way to go,” and “you’re doing a great job.”

There appears to be a great respect for the artists and their creative water tank paintings because there has never been any graffiti, which is a good selling point for communities; the cost of removing graffiti can put a

dent in city coffers.

The Hennigs use an epoxy paint, the same paint that is used as the original coating for the metal of the tank and lasts about 20 years. It takes a week or two to paint a water tank.

Water towers are frequently 100 to 120 ft (30 to 36 m) high, and the artists prefer to use a manlift instead of scaffolding. Perhaps the idea of scaffolding leaves a bad taste for Donna. Several years ago she was seriously injured in a fall from scaffolding. Since that time she stands on the ground and directs her artist crews.

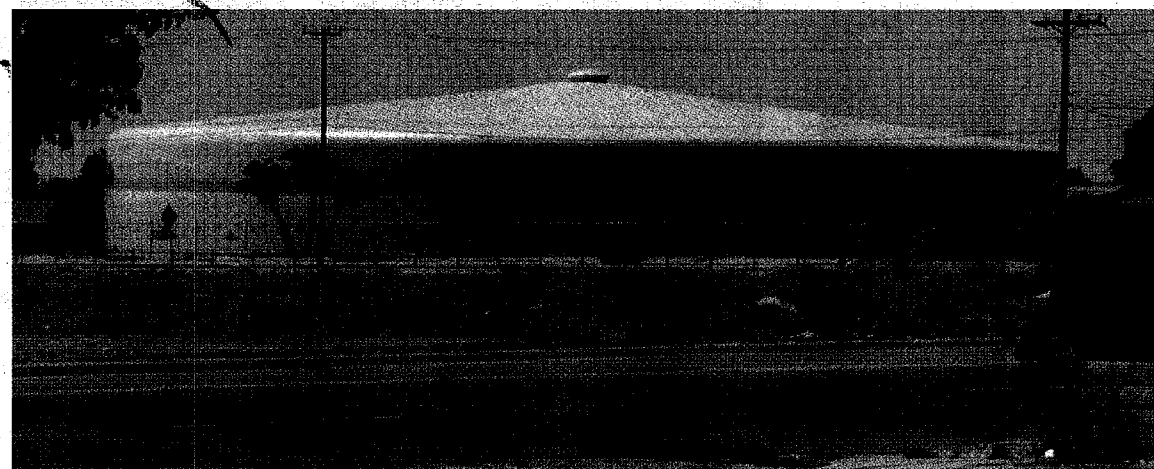
Donna explains that her artists free-hand the whole creative process while hanging in the air. If they see a tree around the tank that has character, they may replicate it. Donna does the initial sketching, creates the colors, and directs the painting.

How did the Hennigs get into this business? Donna—who painted murals in schools, post offices, and restaurants—was designated the top muralist for schools in the state of Washington. With that reputation, she was asked to paint a water tank in Bellevue, Wash., and she’s been doing it ever since.

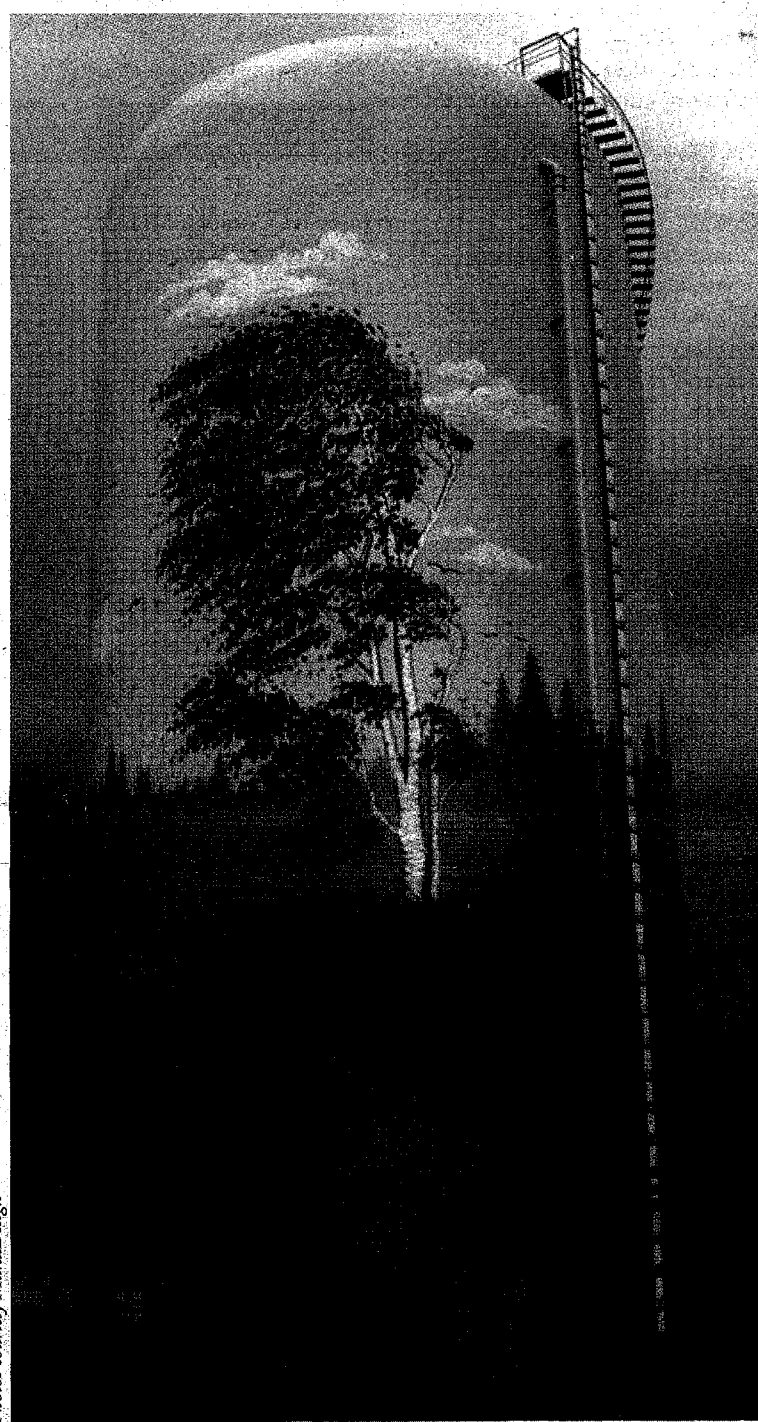
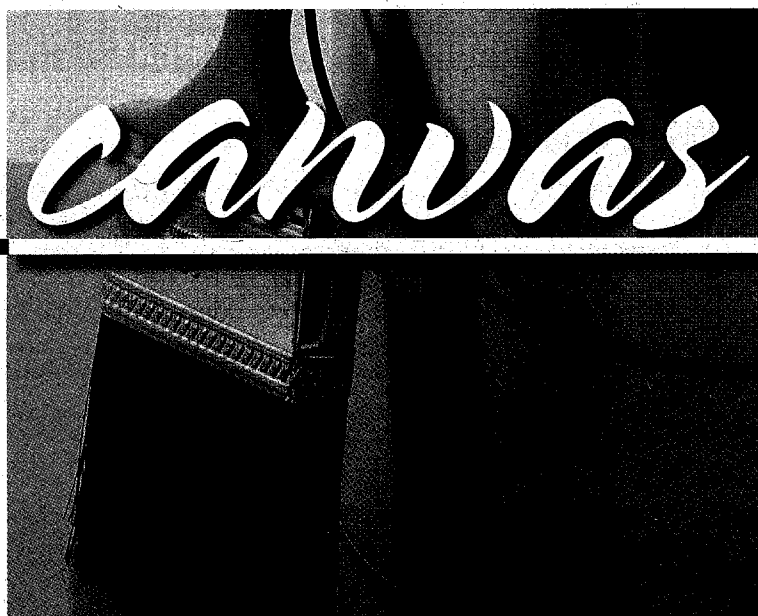
Once when Donna was interviewed on TV about her murals, a small girl looked at Donna and said, “You are such a lucky girl. You get paid to paint on walls!” She does and she loves it.

*Shirley Johnson*  
Contributing Editor

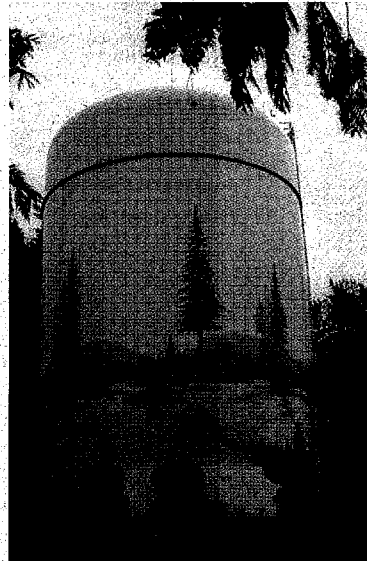
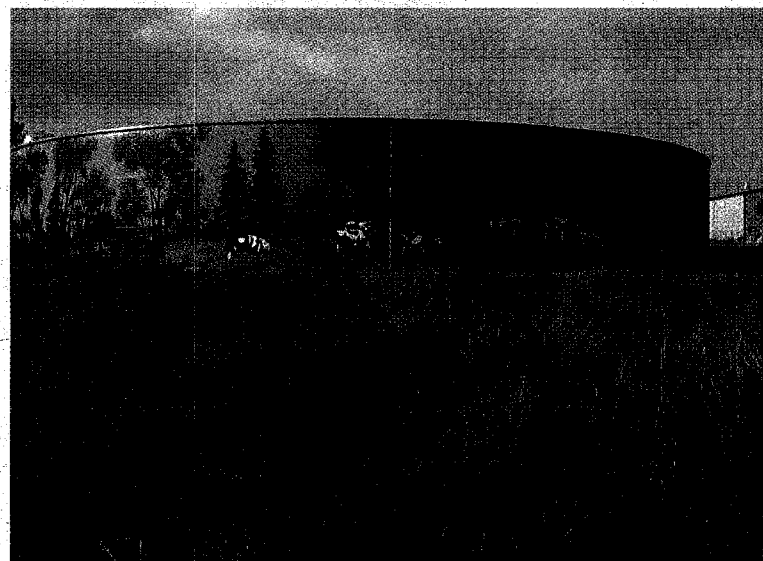
**A water tank in Rialto, Calif., (below) reflects the desert landscape, distant mountains, and palm trees. MuralDesign artists painted color bands at the tank in Burien, Wash., (inset above) that will blend into the various forest shades of the final picture.**



Photos courtesy MuralDesign



**Without a background of real trees, Donna Hennig and her artists created a landscape in Kent, Wash., that blends with the environment by mirroring the blue-gray sky (above). The design for a tank in Kalama, Wash., (below) continues the visual flow of the adjacent homeowner’s property with the rolling landscape and driveway.**



**Another tank in Washington was painted with cows (above left) to reflect the agricultural surroundings, while the Issaquah, Wash., tank (above right) is a focal point at the water district’s headquarters.**

