

Pass It On®...

The Art of Doing Good.

How 18-year-old Gloria Barron Prize winner Austin Picinich is saving the salmon of Seattle by painting community murals.

When you have big dreams, you need a big canvas. Austin Picinich's dreams center on his home state of Washington and its dwindling salmon population.

While streams flow downhill into the ocean, salmon make their way upstream to spawn. But recent droughts, commercial development and pollution have made it difficult for salmon to make the journey. Juanita Creek was hit particularly hard, and while conservation groups were already at work, what the effort needed was more public attention. Restoring the creek would require the entire community to be aware of the issues and imagine what the creek would be like restored to its former abundant condition.

Austin went to work using his artistic talents to make a difference. He created Save Our Salmon through Art (SOSA) and then found the perfect wall in the community to house a mural bringing focus to the issue. Then he enlisted neighbors, friends and volunteers to bring it all to life.

"The thing about paint is that you can make mistakes and just paint over it," says Austin. "And then it will be perfect."

This philosophy of just working at it until you get it right is embodied in another organization Austin is working with: SalmonWatchers, led by biology professor Jeff Jensen. Like Austin's philosophy on painting, the SalmonWatchers program takes a fresh look at the mistakes of the past and gives the streams a makeover. Teams of SalmonWatchers volunteers are building egg incubators and natural resources for salmon to thrive. But the effort is more than a few people can accomplish. And that's where Austin put his skills to work.

By creating murals — big murals — in communities where depleted streams run, Austin is raising awareness of the need for all to get involved. He begins a project by first outlining the mural and color-coding the sections. Then he organizes a community painting day, and volunteers show up,

glad to be part of a project that supports bringing the salmon back.

So far, Austin's efforts have involved over 20 communities and nearly 400 volunteers and raised more than \$18,000 for stream restoration efforts. Austin smiles, clutching a handful of well-used paintbrushes: "I've learned that the power of WE can start with one person, even if that one person is just a high schooler who likes art."

As nature reclaims her place in our lives, we become more aware of the diversity of beauty around us. We are happier when surrounded by the abundance of life — and the good friends we enjoy it with.

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