

Local artist paints the town...

Buildings come alive with history, art and culture



Local artist, Star Bales, stands in front of mural painted at the new Gazette office, located at 525 W. Bradley Ave. in El Cajon.

by Debbie Norman

Only in America, are the words and sentiment that best describes how local artist, Star Bales, feels about her new homeland — The United States of America. Bales says that saying is very popular in Iraq among artists and those with passion for opportunity.

The Caldean Iraqi left Iraq in 1979 at the tender age of 16 to join her two brothers in the states, shortly after Saddam Hussein had taken power in

Iraq. "Flying into New York was the happiest moment in my life," Bales stated. "When the pilot said 'We are now flying over N.Y. USA,' and looking at New York City from above, was a dream come true," she continued.

Living in Iraq was difficult, to say the least, for this young artist. Her father had to travel great distances to find art supplies for his daughter and she was discouraged by society to paint. Only her father encouraged her to continue her dream.

Bales doesn't believe in the saying "Starving Artist." "I had to work my first few years for survival, doing a little art here and there just to get by," Bales said. "You'll only starve if you don't try hard enough!"

From New York City, Bales moved to Sacramento where she resided for two years before coming to El Cajon. "El Cajon was friendly and very receptive to my art," she said. "So it was easy for me to make this my home."

Since being in El Cajon,

Bales has brought art and culture to many areas including the Downtown Redevelopment District. You'll find her art in many of the restaurants including Mangia Bene's Ristorante Italiano, Sam's Bar and Grill and Park Café. Bales has brought a touch of 'Little Italy' to El Cajon through Mangia Bene's and Mamma Rosa and a touch of the Middle East in Sam's Bar and Grill. She has brought beauty and grace to St. Peter's Church and St. Michael's Church, both in El

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