



## UPPER MERION TRICENTENNIAL MURAL PROJECT

Upper Merion is celebrating its 300-year anniversary this year.

With it we will showcase a mural that embodies the spirit of our Tricentennial logo:

*Preserving the past, shaping the future.*

### **This is the story of the mural**

In 1976, this mural was installed on the Louderback building along the PA Turnpike. It was painted by local resident and business owner Ted Kunda. At the time of this mural's installation in 1976, it was reputed to be the largest mural in the world. The subject of this mural is a rendition of an iconic 19<sup>th</sup> century painting by a Montgomery County artist from North Wales, William Trego, depicting George Washington and his men at Valley Forge. The mural remained on the Louderback building for over two years. It was then slightly altered to fit inside the old International Arrivals Terminal building at Philadelphia Airport until it was removed due to the terminal's reconstruction. It has spent most of the last 30 years in storage until this year. We are bringing back the mural to celebrate its significant role as a part of our town's heritage. The current installation largely restores it to its original 1976 dimensions.

As part of our charge to “preserve the past,” we have had the mural installed again, this time on the wall of Colonial Electric on Henderson Road on the corner of Church Road, the heart of Upper Merion. This unique piece of Upper Merion's past will be seen by the thousands of pedestrians and motorists, residents and visitors alike, who pass by daily. It will serve as a reminder of the premier national park within our township's borders and of its place in our town's history.

This mural is a unique, one-of-a-kind, local product with ties to George Washington (an American hero), Valley Forge (a local and national landmark), the U.S. Bicentennial (a national celebration that the mural was a part of), a local family (the mural's patriotic artist), and local businesses (those involved with helping to restore this treasure and its part in Upper Merion's history). It is a very powerful and stunning visual reminder of the sacrifices of our country's very first veterans – Washington's soldiers at Valley Forge.

The mural is based on William Trego's iconic American painting, “George Washington Reviewing His Troops at Valley Forge.” A remarkable fact about Trego is that he is widely considered to be the greatest disabled American artist. He suffered from what was probably polio from the age of two, when his hands and feet became nearly paralyzed. To paint his extraordinary pictures, he jammed a pencil and later a brush into his right hand while guiding it with his left. This painting by Trego was the basis for the 1976 U.S. Bicentennial commemorative postage stamp. Trego's original painting is currently on display at the Valley Forge National Park Visitor Center and is a part of their permanent collection.

When you look at the mural, artist Ted Kunda's signature appears on the bottom right. He has acknowledged his debt to Trego by including Trego's signature on the bottom left of the mural.

The mural will be displayed outdoors at the Colonial Electric Company site on Henderson Road for at least 18 months – after which the Kunda family would like to find a permanent indoor home for this treasured piece of history.

### **This is the background of the mural's own story:**

The mural measures 20' H x 80' L. It is made up of 40 individual 4' x 10' plywood panels, plus a series of panels with wording below the mural. Ted Kunda used "Seashore Acrylic" MAB paints to create this work. The mural was painted over several months inside the Kunda Sign Company building at 214 E. DeKalb Pike. Several missing panels had to be recreated to replicate the full original mural. This recreation was accomplished by the sister-in-law of Skip Kunda, Jane Hill Golas. Jane has painted for 35 years, starting after graduation from Rosemont College and continuing with a master's degree in fine arts (MFA) from Catholic University. Three of the panels had to be recreated to replace the cutouts made for the mural's installation in the Philadelphia Airport's international terminal and the portions that were lost during the demolition of that same terminal. Matching paints were donated by the Sherwin-Williams Paint store in King of Prussia (the company that bought out MAB Paint). The mural has been carefully stored by the Kunda family, which was overseen in particular by Skip Kunda, and is in excellent condition.

Like his brothers Walt Kunda and Stanley "Chip" Kunda, Ted Kunda, the creator of the mural, was an Army Air Force veteran of WWII. Ted was the commander of a B-17 bomber that was shot down over Germany on his 19th mission. He was also Skip Kunda's godfather. Ted Kunda served on the Upper Merion Planning Commission for more than 25 years. His brother and partner in Kunda Sign Company, Chip Kunda, turned 90 earlier this year and was a volunteer with the Upper Merion ambulance squad for many years. Walt Kunda was the president of Kunda Beverage for decades. In WWII, Walt was the pilot of an L-5 medical evacuation aircraft in Burma. Chip trained to fly P-51 fighter planes and was not deployed overseas only because the war had ended.

The contractor who just reinstalled the mural has his own connection to our local history. His great-great-grandfather designed and built the famous Conestoga wagons.

Another note of interest about the mural is that some of the likenesses of the people depicted in it were supposedly based on township supervisors or other local "bigwigs" that were prominent during the time the mural was painted in 1976. For example, Lew Louderback (of Louderback Moving Co.) is reputed to be the model for George Washington's depiction. We invite all of our township's "old-timers" to have a look and see if they recognize anyone they remember in the faces of the mural's soldiers.

### **Our heartfelt thanks go out to the many people and organizations that made this possible:**

- Upper Merion Supervisor Carole Kenney for "finding" the lost mural and spearheading this mural project along with Upper Merion Tricentennial Committee member Eileen Rodrique
- Skip Kunda, Chris Kunda, and the Kunda family as a whole for generously providing financial support and necessary materials to share their family's artwork with us for this Upper Merion Tricentennial mural project and for working diligently for over a year with Carole and Eileen to bring the mural back to the people of our township
- Jane Hill Golas for painting replacements for the missing panels
- Sherwin-Williams for in-kind donation of new paint for the mural and suggestions based on their technical paint-matching expertise
- Home Depot for in-kind donation of materials for the mural's installation
- Fox-Rothschild, LLC for financial support for the mural's installation
- Fastenal Inc. for in-kind donation of materials for the mural's installation
- Colonial Electric for allowing the mural to be installed on their building and for donating lighting for the mural
- Upper Merion BCA (Board of Community Assistance) for their grant for the mural's installation
- Merit Service Solutions for financial support for the mural's installation
- Sustainable Waste Solutions for financial support for the mural's installation
- Conestoga Renovations for installation
- Devon Remodeling for installation
- Graber Letterin', Inc. for providing signage