



Township of Belleville  
*New Jersey*

Media Contact:  
Chuck O'Donnell  
732-407-4341  
[chuck@jaffecom.com](mailto:chuck@jaffecom.com)

---

**For Immediate release**

## **Sprawling Cherry Blossom Mural a Collaboration Between Township, Local Artist, Belleville High School Students and Others**

**BELLEVILLE, NJ – October 6, 2020** – It takes a village to help beautify a township.

Thanks to a united effort from many – including budding Belleville High School artists and one local painter with a lot of talent and pride in her adopted home – a large swath of concrete wall along the Passaic River has been transformed into a sprawling work of art.

The space is now a celebration of the Township's world-famous cherry blossoms – wholly appropriate because Belleville is The Cherry Blossom Capital of America.

The Cherry Blossom Art Mural greets visitors with long, twisting branches covered in life-like blossoms. It is proudly emblazoned with the words "Welcome to Belleville," with the town's name bursting in cherry-blossom pinks and lavenders, and etched in yellow.

"To see the length of an unsightly concrete embankment transformed into an attractive canvas completely covered in soft branching cherry blossom flowers is going to be exciting and satisfying to all who see it," Mayor Michael Melham said.

The painting of the wall was coordinated by Athena Zhe, an artist who has settled in Belleville after relocating some 5,000 miles from her native Ukraine.

Zhe, who previously created a large mural and decorated ordinary traffic control boxes, was handpicked for the mural's creation by Belleville's Municipal Green Team. The Green Team recently received funding for the new mural, titled "Welcome to Belleville," an illustration of a continuous pattern of branching cherry blossoms.

Zhe had a lot of help to make the mural come to life. She worked in collaboration with Belleville High School art teacher Carolina Rivera and her art club at the high school.

"The art club members and I were thrilled to be a part of beautifying Belleville's Main Street by helping Athena paint the mural," Rivera said. "Everyone who participated learned from Athena, as well as was proud to help in beautifying the community in which they live. The students will always remember being a part of this experience."

Not only was the location selected for the mural a unique mixture of commercial, industrial and residential areas, but it was handpicked for its importance and visibility. Many of Belleville's historic riverfront houses were demolished and the loss of Belleville's waterfront property is replaced with the concrete embankment that we see today.

Even before a single brush was put to concrete, the Belleville Department of Public Works helped by cleaning the area and removing debris. Then, it painted the solid color for the background.

"This was an amazing collaboration," Zhe said. "I was very delighted to have talented art students from the high school help me paint the mural and beautify our community. It was my pleasure to share painting tips and tricks with the students. They followed the instructions very well, their hard work and painting skills speeded up the process in beautifying our beautiful town."

END