



Frank Ordoñez / The Post-Standard
 THIS ICONIC Syracuse billboard near West Fayette Street features a painting of Marquale Johnson, 13, and Shadasia Stanley, 13, both of Syracuse. The girl in front of them is Onhsti Pegan, 10.

Kids Become Neighborhood Stars

Billboard on Near West Side features 3 Syracuse pupils

By Dave Tobin
 Staff writer

Who are those three smiling youths on the split-image billboard on Syracuse's Near West Side?

They are the first stars of a billboard series called Iconic Syracuse. The left side of the billboard shows a 19th-century photo of snowy Syracuse with people in a street; next to it is the painted-image of the three kids bundled in winter clothing.

The billboard can be seen near West Fayette and West streets. Previous billboards have all been street scenes.

Two of the children saw the billboard for the first time this week. They oohed and ahhed as they stepped out of a van to get a look at it.

"It's actually a little more superior than what I was thinking," said Shadasia Stanley, 13, an eighth-grader at Danforth Middle School, and one of the three. "It's bigger and more colorful."

The boy on the left is Marquale Johnson, 13, an eighth-grader at Cedar Street School.

The girl in the foreground is Onhsti Pegan, 10.

All three students have participated in Syracuse University's Photography and Literacy (PAL) Project, which is housed at SU's

Warehouse, across the street from the billboard. Through PAL, SU students mentor city school pupils using cameras as tools of self-expression.

Johnson, in particular, has taken to the camera, creating self-portraits with words and images, and photographing events at P.E.A.C.E. Inc.'s Southside Family Resource Center, said Lori Covington, adult coordinator of the center on West Castle Street.

The students were chosen for the billboard from their after-school program at P.E.A.C.E. Covington thought having local faces on a billboard at a prominent city entry point could have the potential for a terrific self-esteem boost for the children. It seems to have worked.

"I actually liked the idea when Miss Lori told me about it," said Stanley. "She picked the few students that were really good at the center. It's good to be known as a civilized person with leadership qualities."

The 19th-century image shows a horse pulling a sleigh on University Avenue, near the intersection of Madison Street, said Dennis Connors, curator of history at the Onondaga Historical Association. The figures in the foreground are young boys.



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 MARQUALE JOHNSON (left) and Shadasia Stanley, both 13, were chosen from Syracuse University's Photography and Literacy project to be featured on a billboard near West Fayette and West streets.

The billboard is part of a year-long series called Iconic Syracuse that aims to highlight the historic continuity between the city's culture and architecture, then and now.

Last fall, Greg Mawicke, a fifth-year industrial design major from Milwaukee, met

the three students and photographed them under the West Street railroad bridge. He had illustrated other scenes for the Iconic Syracuse series, each inspired by a historic photograph. For this snowy scene he wanted to paint images of real people. He developed the painting from his

photograph.

After Johnson saw himself on the billboard he was asked how he'd rate it on a five-star system.

"A hundred stars," he said. "No, a million."

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