

## **Marshallese Art Mural Highlights Pacific Islander Culture in Downtown Springdale**

A new mural celebrating Marshallese culture was unveiled in downtown Springdale Nov. 16, thanks to a collaborative effort between the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) Office of Community Health & Research, Arkansas Coalition of Marshallese (ACOM), and the Downtown Springdale Alliance.

UAMS and ACOM reached out to local Marshallese artist Helmar Anitok earlier this year to design a piece of public art that would incorporate culturally significant images and highlight the large presence of Pacific Islanders in Northwest Arkansas, while the Downtown Springdale Alliance helped secure a location for the mural.

“The mural will be a community centerpiece,” said Katie McCraney, a senior project manager in the UAMS Office of Community Health & Research. “We want to celebrate diversity and highlight the Marshallese culture. We hope Helmar’s piece will bring people together to celebrate the heritage and history of the Marshall Islands.”

More than 15,000 Marshallese people live in the Northwest Arkansas area, according to the 2020 census. The United States and the Republic of the Marshall Islands signed a Compact of Free Association in 1986, which allows Marshallese citizens to live, work, and attend school in the United States without a visa. According to the Central Arkansas Library System’s Encyclopedia of Arkansas, Springdale is home to the largest Marshallese population in the continental United States.

“I wanted to come up with something that represents our culture in the Marshall Islands,” Anitok said. “We often state that we are navigators: this piece tells the story of a mother and her sons traveling across the waters.”

UAMS Community Health & Research and ACOM worked with the Downtown Springdale Alliance to secure the placement of the mural in an effort to increase walkability for diverse communities in Springdale.

“There are a lot of reasons to walk around Downtown Springdale: you can visit shops, grab some good food, and get in some physical activity,” McCraney said. “You can also enjoy some wonderful art, and Helmar’s piece adds to the vibrant culture on display in the heart of Springdale.”

The mural is located on the outside wall of Buck’s Emma Ave. Bar & Tap at 111 E. Emma Ave.