OPELUSAS artist adds his creative flair to Capture history

Kayla Gagnet
kagernet@theadvertiser.com

OPELUSAS — Local artist Robert Tinney has traded in his computer mouse and monitor for a paintbrush and a wall of concrete. The Washington resident is most famous for illustrating magazine covers, and he has more recently used graphic design computer programs to create ads and other media. Now, he is just a few weeks away from finishing his largest work yet.

The St. Landry Economic and Industrial Development District commissioned Tinney to create a mural opposite that of fellow artist Tony Wimberly downtown, across from the courthouse. Both murals seek to highlight St. Landry Parish history — everything from alligators to zydeco.

Although Tinney has painted two smaller murals before, he said this project highlights the planning that goes into such a large undertaking.

"A computer allows you to just go wild," Tinney said, because it's easy to move and change things. "A mural is just the opposite. You have to know exactly what's going on that wall."

Tinney has been at work for about two months, working mostly in the afternoons after 3 p.m. That's when the hot summer sun passes over to the other side of the building, allowing Tinney to work in some shade.

"I find a mural to be fun, even in the heat," Tinney said.

Tinney began his mural well after Wimberly, who is creating a type of collage of images including steamboats, plantations, cypress trees and famous Opelousas resident and Alamo martyr Jim Bowie.

"I really took the cue from what he hadn't done," Tinney said. He decided to highlight a few things that Wimberly didn't have in his mural — zydeco music, the Opelousa tribe and the famous Seven Brothers Oak Tree.

Tinney said he is about 80 percent finished with the work.

"Doing a mural is just like doing a regular painting in slow motion," Tinney said. "You just have so much area to cover."

The opportunity to work on a mural is exciting for an artist, Tinney said. He said "bigger is better," and joked that the work will likely outlive him.

Tinney said he also is glad to focus on the area's history — although his father isn't from Louisiana, his mother grew up in the northern part of the parish.

"I kind of feel like at least part of my ancestors had a lot to do with this part of Louisiana," Tinney said.