**Unify Akron project aims to assist local businesses**

By Eric Poston

WEST AKRON — West Akron resident Kevin Friend hopes to bring the community together and help local businesses during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.  
Friend, 56, said between the pandemic and social injustice and inequality brought into focus from the death of George Floyd, he wanted to do something. Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, died after a white Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee on Floyd’s neck for an extended period of time as he was being arrested May 25, according to the criminal complaint filed against the officer. His death spurred protests against racism and police brutality in Akron and Cleveland, as well as throughout the U.S., with some involving violence.  
“What have I done to try to change anything,” Friend said he asked himself.  
He said he wants to show his three daughters he is attempting to make the world a better place.  
Friend, who works for Amwell Telemedicine Technology Solutions, came up with the idea of Unify Akron, a citywide campaign to help locally owned businesses attract new customers during the pandemic.  
The idea stems from a mural Friend created in partnership with the City of Akron in 2018 called Unify, which spreads the message of love, peace and equality. He said two of the murals were displayed in the tunnel of the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail under Wilbeth Road.  
Friend recently worked with Repros Inc. to put his mural design on a banner, which is now displayed on seven different buildings in Akron.  
Unify Akron is a campaign to have residents visit different businesses around Akron and patronize the business to obtain a stamp on a passport sheet Friend created. He said he started working on the project in May and has 32 businesses that have agreed to take part. Friend is offering $5,000 of his own money to purchase gift cards to assist local businesses.  
He said the first 100 people to obtain 25 stamps with at least one stamp from each ward in the city will win a $50 gift card of their choice to one of the participating businesses.  
“I tried to structure it so business owners didn’t have to do anything,” Friend said. “I want to help them during [the] COVID[-19 pandemic].”  
Those interested in participating in Unify Akron will need to take a photo of the passport with 25 stamps on it and email it to [Arevolt64@gmail.com](mailto:Arevolt64@gmail.com).  
Unify Akron will begin Oct. 31 and passport sheets are available at all 32 participating businesses and also can be downloaded from Friend’s website, [www.arevolt64.com](http://www.arevolt64.com/), and social media pages (search ARevolT64 on Facebook and Instagram).  
Friend hopes Unify Akron will help the community explore other parts of Akron and inform them of businesses that exist in the city.  
“There are a lot of beautiful businesses here in the city,” said Friend, adding he is thankful for the “overwhelming” support from local businesses for his project.  
Friend plans to post some information about each business on his Facebook and Instagram pages and website to help people learn more about each business.  
He also is asking participants to take a selfie at businesses or by the murals and post them to social media using the tag “ARevolT64.”  
Friend said his artist name is ARevolT, which is a combination of the words “art” and “love.”  
Friend said he has informed Akron Mayor Dan Horrigan of the project, but he hasn’t asked the city for any help. He hopes to maybe partner with the City of Akron’s new Akronite app in the future, which was recently launched to help support small businesses.