Unify~Akron~ project aims to assist local businesses

By EricPoston~

WEST AKRON — WestAkron~ resident KevinFriend~ 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 GeorgeFloyd~, he wanted to do something. Floyd, a 46yearold~ 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 May25~, 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 US~, 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 AmwellTelemedicineTechnologySolutions~, 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 CityofAkron~ 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 OhioErieCanalTowpathTrail~ under Wilbeth Road.

Friend~ recently worked with ReprosInc~ 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 $50~00~ 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 .

Unify~Akron~ will begin Oct31~ and passport sheets are available at all 32~ participating businesses and also can be downloaded from Friend~’s website, , 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.”