

f.y.i. / local report

By Robert Eshman, Associate Editor

The Return of the Mural

The mural is back. Long a colorful part of the Venice Boardwalk, and a constant public reminder of the neighborhood's Jewish heritage, the fanciful Chagall-style mural has returned to its home on the walls of the Israel Levin Center.

Artist Christina Schlesinger created the mural at 201 Ocean Front Walk in 1991. Sponsored by the community arts organization, SPARC, the mural was a collage of themes both Jewish and Venetian. Tourists stopped to gawk and take snapshots, and it wasn't unusual to see one of the Jewish seniors from the Israel Levin Center give an impromptu description of the images and Yiddish words.

But the mural, which was titled "Mark Chagall Comes to Venice Beach," was, like the Israel Levin Center itself, a casualty of the Northridge earthquake. While the center was undergoing major structural repairs as a result of quake damage, the mural had to be sandblasted.

After repairs to the building were completed, the fate of the lost mural was uncertain. But a \$15,000 grant from the Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles helped fund a major restoration project. Schlesinger, the daughter of historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., returned from her home in New York City to oversee the work. She and several assistants, including two homeless artists, worked 10-hour days to complete the project in what was clearly a labor of love.

The result was officially unveiled two weeks ago. Renamed "Mark Chagall Returns to Venice Beach," the vibrantly colored mural repeats much of the folk art and symbolism from the previous work, but adds several new elements. One of the Jews featured depicts the face of Schlesinger's close friend, Rick Barnett, an artist who pushed for the original mural. Barnett died recently of complications from AIDS at age 36.

The mural includes tributes to "Fiddler on the Roof," a black Moses receiving the Ten Commandments, a bow to "Jerusalem 3000," and a Jew holding the Torah open to the commandment "Honor Thy Father and Mother."

Only-in-Venice images such as the Phoenix House,



the Boardwalk pagodas and an angel on in-line skates appear in the mural, as does a Yiddish poem by Dora Bayrack, a member of the Levin Center who died several years ago at age 99.

A local homeless man summed up the feelings of many when he told a reporter who was photographing the mural, "It's nice to have that painting back." He added, "This one's better." ■

"Mark Chagall Returns to Venice Beach," (above and at right) the vibrantly colored mural repeats much of the folk art and symbolism from the previous work, but adds several new elements.

