

ST. PAUL AND SUBURBS

ST. PAUL WEST SIDE

Wellstone center to unveil art

Works pay tribute to immigrants' roots

BY LAURA YUEN
Pioneer Press

Evelyn Rosenberg could blow up a building with the kind of explosives she uses to create art. The New Mexico sculptor even hides out in a bunker as she blasts away in the name of *bas relief*.

After St. Paul's Neighborhood House commissioned her to leave her mark on a new facility named after the late Sen. Paul and Sheila Wellstone, Rosenberg used that destructive technique to tell a story of coming together. Eight brass wall panels, mounted to the rotunda of the nonprofit's new home, depict immigrants putting down roots and a tapestry of fabrics from all over the world.

From explosion to creation? Rosenberg equates it with another process.

"It's like birth," the artist said. "You have this big, messy, horrible, disgusting process, and you get this beautiful baby."

Lucky for Neighborhood House, Rosenberg did all her

work offsite.

The one-time settlement house will unveil Rosenberg's pieces this weekend for the grand-opening celebration of the Paul and Sheila Wellstone Center for Community Building, a modern, 93,000-square-foot West Side showpiece that is continuing Neighborhood House's role as a first stop for new immigrants and refugees.

Since the \$25 million facility opened in January, it has attracted record numbers of people participating in its English classes, youth programs and food shelf, said Neighborhood House President Dan Hoxworth. For example, more than 1,000 kids have registered for leadership programs or recreational activities this year, tripling last year's enrollment.

Visitors at Sunday's celebration will be greeted with a very different lobby. In one of the brass wall panels installed this week, called "Tree of Life," Rosenberg rendered a tree teeming with immigrants: violin-playing Gypsies, a kilted Scot, a Nor-

IF YOU GO

The Wellstone Center for Community Building and the city's El Rio Vista Recreation Center will host a community celebration from 12:30 to 6 p.m. Sunday. All are welcome to dress in their ancestors' immigrant clothing and join a "heritage parade" at 12:30 p.m. from the nearby

Roosevelt Elementary School to the Wellstone Center. A ribbon-cutting ceremony begins at 1 p.m., followed by free ice cream and cultural performances. The Wellstone Center, which houses the city's new recreation center, is at 179 East Robie St. in St. Paul.

wegian bundled up for snow and women wearing Balinese headpieces and African necklaces.

"They're forming new roots and becoming one tree, but keeping their own identities," Rosenberg said.

Above the panels, she has mounted words once spoken by the Wellstones, such as the late senator's favorite, "We all do better when we all do better."

Rosenberg spent six months on the project at a center for explosives research in Socorro, N.M., using a method she invented, called "detonography." For each piece, she placed a metal plate between a sheet of plastic explosive and a plaster

molding. She then retreated to a bunker and flipped a switch to set off the explosion.

The enormous pressure of the blast pushes the metal into the mold, creating the sculpture. It also can transfer the finest of patterns and textures — from lace fabrics or tree leaves — onto the brass plates.

On the center's exterior walls, West Side native and artist Craig David has installed the first of four mosaic murals telling the history of the neighborhood. Over the past few weeks, David approached kids on the sidewalk asking if they would help mount a tile onto the mosaic.