

An effort to resurrect a dead art form

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Southeast Missourian

Most of the time the customers do the painting at Creative Ewe Pottery.

The little shop on Independence Street sells pottery for its customers to paint themselves, then fires and glazes them. But for the last month or so, shop co-owner Toni Arnold and her niece Lacey Neal have been painting 160 tiles for the renovation of the Southeast Missourian building.

"We've been eating, breathing and sleeping tiles," Arnold said. "Our whole vocabulary is now tiles. It will be worth it, because it will just be cool to be a part of history."

The tiles were initially placed on the building in 1925. Little information on them is available other than they were made by Moravian artisans of Eastern European descent in their homes in Pennsylvania.

Arnold and Neal painted ceramic tiles in the same patterns as the old tiles, spending anywhere from two to three hours on each piece. The tile will be placed on the front and Lorimier Street side of the Southeast Missourian building.

The process starts with tracing a

design on a blank tile using carbon paper. Then two to three coats of paint are applied, followed by a black outline painted on the patterns. The paint is followed by a clear glaze and the firing of the tiles in a kiln.

Arnold and Neal have met many challenges in their project. Besides the issue of time -- Neal is a sophomore art major at Southeast Missouri State University with another job and Arnold helps run the shop with Neal's mother, Diane Neal -- the lack of information on the origin of the tiles has caused difficulties.

A custom color had to be mixed for some tiles and the artisans had to find materials to recreate the speckled effect of the old tiles. They also had to work from photographs of the original tiles. Early on in the process, the completed new tiles had to be brought to the Southeast Missourian building and compared to the old tiles to make sure the color and texture was correct.

"We went through 10 samples just trying to get the paint to look right," said Arnold.

The tiles had to be just right to get approval under historic preservation rules.

Now that the tiles are finished,



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Lacey Neal of Creative Ewe Pottery in Cape Girardeau painted a tile to match the 80-year-old ceramic tiles on the Southeast Missourian building.

Arnold and Neal are ready for the relief and to put their mark on a historic building. To see their work, visit the Southeast Missourian centennial celebration on Oct. 1.