

A WORLD OF *Imagination*

As travelers headed north roll into Payson on the Beeline Highway, they're greeted by a rather nondescript single-story brick building with a Dutch gable roof. The structure — which once housed the popular Lasso American Kitchen — now stands empty, its lights off and its parking lot vacant.

But eagle-eyed drivers will notice a splash of color on the side of the otherwise drab brown exterior. Brilliant pinks, purples, yellows and blues serve as a backdrop for fantastical, dreamlike images. A bold, smiling sunflower blossoms from a young girl's head. A spaceman and cyclopic balloon float in the background.



Showcasing a world of imagination, the more than 50 murals that Isaac Caruso's has painted around Arizona are now featured in his new children's book, "Sam & Sara."

“I think of this project as my love letter to Arizona. *Isaac Caruso*”

Writer Rebecca L. Rhoades



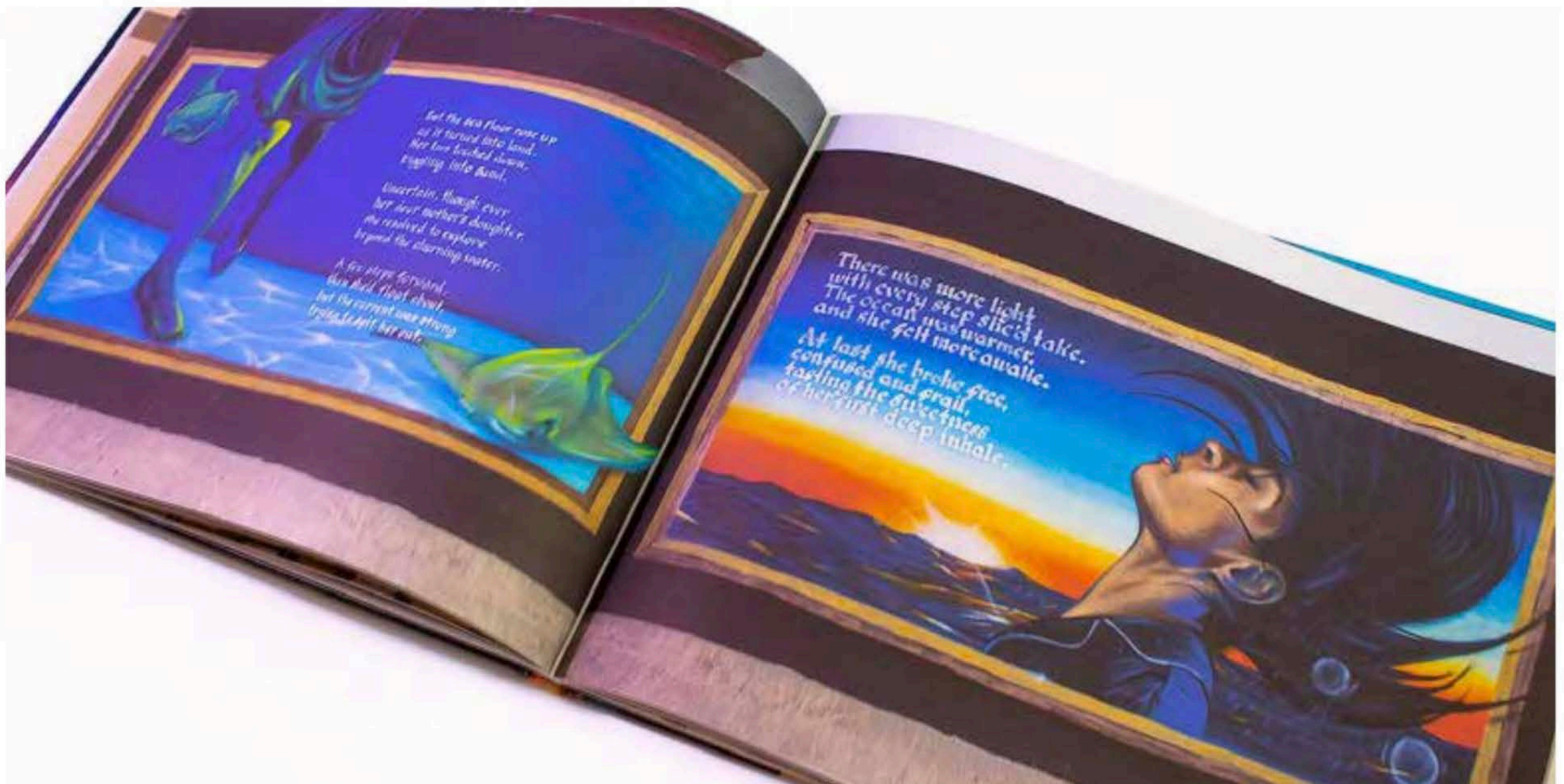
Complementing the playful scene, in white calligraphy, are the words: “It felt like home when she arrived that day / and loved it so much, she decided to stay. / Becoming the figment of her old persona ... / A beautiful sunflower from Arizona. / Just like the ones that’d blossom and grow / at her old house, outside her window.”

The mural, which was created by Phoenix-based artist Isaac Caruso, showcases a world of imagination. It’s just one of more than 50 he’s painted around the state that are now featured in his new children’s book, “Sam & Sara.”

Illustrated entirely with Caruso’s mural art, the book tells the story of a daydreamer who enters a land of dreams and make-believe. She loves it so much that she decides to stay and becomes what Caruso calls a “figment.” She has a daughter, Sara, who hears stories about her mom’s hometown of Phoenix and decides to go on her own adventure by land, sea and air to discover the beautiful desert destination.



Photo by Lori Bentley



“Before I did this book, I had no idea that sunflowers are indigenous to this part of the world,” Caruso says. “They’re these worldwide icons of beauty — van Gogh painted them. But nobody knows they’re from here. I think our community gets slept on as a place with real creative potential. And we’re more influential than we even know. We need to recognize our own abilities. So I use sunflowers as a symbol for creativity.”

The lovely yellow blooms also represent the contributions and possibilities of the neurodivergent community — one that’s especially significant for Caruso. The artist, who grew up in the Valley and went to college at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, has attention deficit disorder.

“A big theme in my work is people who are neurodivergent,” Caruso notes. “And I belong to that community. So for people with ADD, ADHD and autism, it’s kind of embracing the way we think and seeing it not so much as a disability but as a superpower.”

ART FOR ALL

Caruso has been creating murals and public art for more than a decade. His large-scale scenes can be found on the sides of businesses and walls throughout the Valley, from a stunning display of nature at the popular 1-1/2 Street alley located behind The Churchill in downtown Phoenix to a multistory-high psychedelic collage on the top floors of the Canopy Tempe hotel.

APS, Free Arts, Scottsdale Public Art and Spaces of Opportunity are just some of the local companies and

*Fun, comfy,
sophisticated &
casual clothing*



Bags & Rags
LADIES FINE APPAREL

602-628-5757 • 16 EASY STREET CAREFREE, AZ
www.bagsandragsaz.com



This month, Isaac Caruso will bring the characters in his murals and book to life as part of an augmented reality activation during Canal Convergence in Scottsdale.

organizations that have commissioned artwork from him. His work has even taken him to such exotic locales as Montevideo, Uruguay, and Norway's Svalbard islands.

But growing up with a creative mind wasn't always easy. Like the characters in his book, Caruso used imagination to cope.

"Growing up as a neurodivergent learner, I definitely butted heads with all my teachers," Caruso recalls. "My outlet became art. It was a place where I could be free to express and think the way that I do — and I was just really good at it, and people liked it."

Caruso first came up with the idea to do a children's book while he was studying at NAU more than 10 years ago. The concept really began to take shape four years ago, when the artist received a commission in Tucson to teach children how to paint murals.

"I didn't know anything about Tucson or anybody in Tucson, so I thought, 'I'm just going to sit down and write this book that I've always been wanting to do,'" he says. "I spent the whole summer making it work and then making it rhyme. But I felt that it was an interesting way to turn the classic children's book format on its head."

Once Caruso had the passages and illustrations sketched out, he decided to reach out to small towns — many of which don't have budgets for public art — and offer to create murals for them free of charge.

"I always drove by these small towns and wondered, 'What would it be like to live in Ajo or Chloride?'" he says. "I wanted to help cultivate interest in these small communities that are all special and diverse. I wanted to create a project that really tied the whole state together."

From Tucson to Tubac, Winslow to Seligman, Payson to Patagonia, Caruso has traveled the state in his modified white Sprinter van, nicknamed Vanna White — with his adopted bull terrier, Gustavo, at his side — painting technicolor dreamscapes, complete with poetry, with spray paint and acrylic house paint.

Familiar images of Sonoran flora and fauna, as well as local landmarks, make frequent appearances. For example, in the mural painted at the Pinal County Historical Museum in Florence, Caruso added the town's F Mountain into the background.



WISTL SKIN

*Mention this ad and get membership
for an introductory rate ~~\$195!~~*

\$179



Membership Benefits

\$195 PER MONTH RECEIVE ONE TREATMENT

Plus, enjoy these specials:

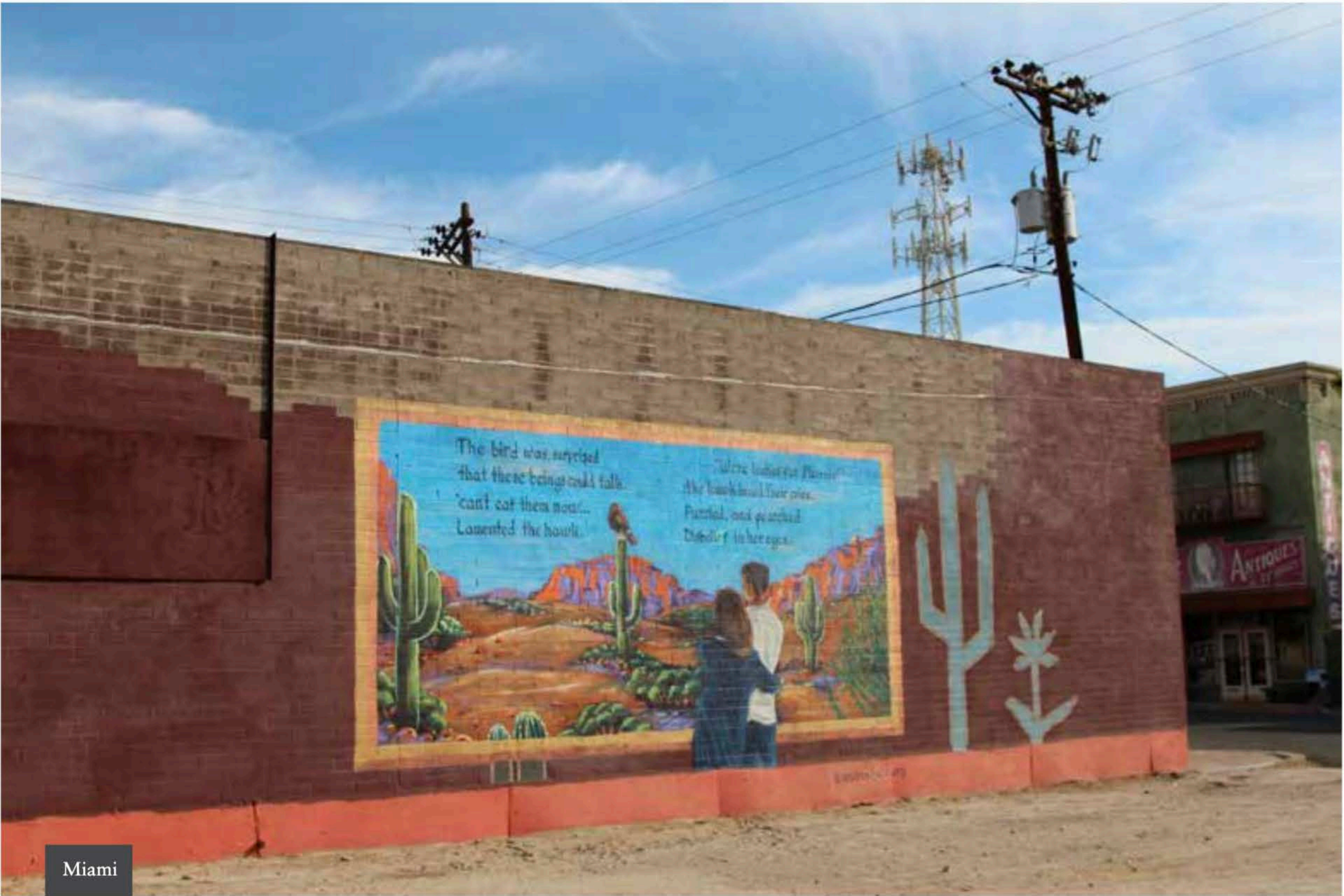
**20% OFF SkinCeuticals & SkinMedica Retail Products
in addition to receiving your Allē points!**

**10% OFF Any additional Facial treatment
including IPL, MicroNeedling, Laser, Advanced Peels,
Laser Hair Reduction & MORE!**

**10% OFF all Injectables with Dr. Victoria Aimé,
Aesthetic Plastic Surgeon.**

WWW.CAREFREEMEDSPA.COM

CALL/TEXT 855-458-9006 | 37555 N. HUM RD. | CAREFREE



Miami



Cottonwood

"I think of this project as my love letter to Arizona," Caruso says.

Each mural, and each poem, connects to the next but also stands on its own.

"I wanted to make sure that every mural by itself was interesting, but then also interesting as a collective," Caruso points out.

As such, art lovers who wish to follow the story in person can view one or 10 or 50 murals in any order they choose — and they're always guaranteed to come away from the experience with a new outlook and appreciation for everyone around them.

BRINGING FIGMENTS TO LIFE

This month, Caruso will bring the characters in his murals and book to life as part of an augmented reality activation during Canal Convergence in Scottsdale. A frequent contributor to the annual waterfront art festival, the artist will paint a 20-by-8-foot mural, and viewers, using a special app, will be able to interact with the characters.

"They'll start to make noise and move around," Caruso explains. "You can take a selfie with them and make it feel like a really immersive environment that you can walk into."

Caruso is also creating two additional murals: one in Scottsdale Fashion Square and another at Scottsdale Civic Center. The project is a collaboration between

the mall, Canal Convergence and apparel company Lululemon, which is holding its popular 10K race in the city on the last day of the public art event.

Jennifer Gill, deputy director for Canal Convergence, says that the trio of augmented reality activations will create an interesting narrative that takes on the imaginative component of play and the role that it has in our lives.

"Art and imagination allow people to push past whatever hurdles they may face," Gill says. "By drawing from his own personal experience and his attention to the neurodivergent audience, there's a level of acceptance. He's showing us that you can do anything, that you don't have to be pigeon-holed into one place — whether you were putting yourself there or someone else was."

For Caruso, his artwork and his book are ways to share his love for his home state and his nontraditional approach to life.

"I really hope that people will go out and look for the murals," he says. "I hope that it's a break from the norm. I hope that people will become more interested in public art because of it. And I hope that people will embrace the neurodivergent community more because of it."

samandsara.org
isaacncaruso.com

Art
Canal Convergence
Nov. 3–12 | Scottsdale Waterfront | 7135 E. Camelback Road, Scottsdale
Free | canalconvergence.com

NOW OPEN

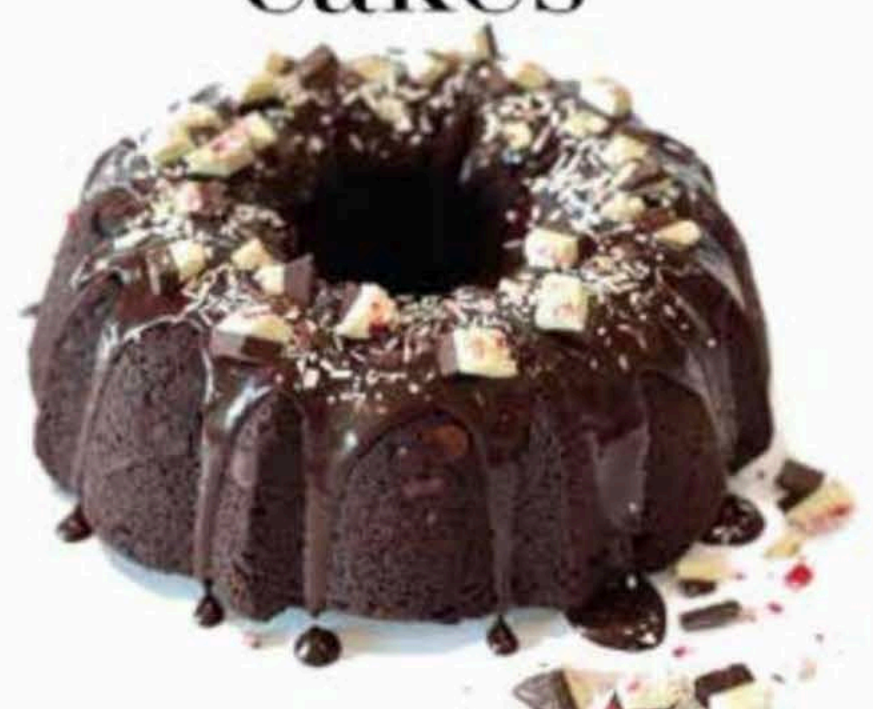
Happy Bee Meadery



WINE * MEAD * BEER

INFO@HAPPYBEEMEADERY.COM
6061 E CAVE CREEK RD. | CAVE CREEK | 602-342-5624

**addie
cakes**



addiecakes.com

WE REMODELED OUR SHOWROOM!!
Come in, see what's new and **SAVE UP TO 35%**



**Dorleg
Creations**

Follow us on social media for specially priced items!

HOURS: Monday - Friday 10 - 5, or by appointment.
Stagecoach Village: 7100 E Cave Creek Rd, Units 129 & 130
Cave Creek, AZ 85331

480-595-5018 WWW.DORLEGCREATIONS.COM

Unique Custom Furniture & Upholstery