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Teen tagger helps right his wrong

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Marcus Allen would rather be called an "artist" than a "tagger."

That's one reason the 16-year-old agreed to help clean up the graffiti he created on the side of one of the buildings where he lives in the Aurora Housing Authority's Westwood Apartment Complex on the city's west side.

Another reason was because his mother said so.

"He's a good kid," his mother, Verna Hodges, said. "He made a mistake and I wanted him to learn from it. I hope and pray that next time he thinks before he does something like this."

Hodges said the graffiti, which was not gang-related, was clearly the work of her son. "I know he likes to draw and I know he likes Bob Marley," she said. One of the larger images on the brick wall showed a caricature that is associated with Marley.

And, her son admitted he did the deed after residents of the complex turned him in.

"I did it because I'd never done anything like that before," Allen said. "The building was big, and brown and it went with the (spray) paint color I had." Allen said he wrote the name of the complex on the wall along with some designs and characters.

"I usually draw on paper, but I made a dumb choice," he said. "I wanted to help clean it up because it was my fault and my mom could've got put out for it."

Hodges said her family's eviction could have been a result of her son's tagging, but complex officials were lenient "because they know he's a good kid."

"He's a teenager and his father is not in his life," Hodges said. "So they looked over it."

The City of Aurora agreed to let Allen help right his wrong.

Terry Miller, a maintenance service worker with the city, said in the three years he has been on the job, no one has ever volunteered to help clean up their own graffiti. Under Miller's direction, Allen rolled dark brown paint over the brick wall.

Back in his room in the complex, Allen showed off some of his drawings with pride.

He admitted it was better to display drawings on paper than on large brick walls in his apartment complex. "It was just so big and brown," he said. "One night I just did it."

And in the light of day a few weeks later, he just undid it.

(Click on a photo to see a larger view)



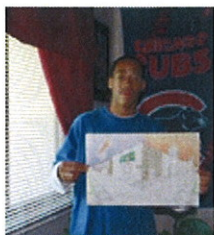
Marcus Allen shows off a drawing in his room



A drawing of a favorite rap groups decorates Marcus Allen's bedroom wall



Marcus Allen near a t-shirt that hangs on his wall



Marcus Allen holds a picture he drew in an eighth grade art class



Marcus Allen covers the graffiti he created in his apartment complex

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