Todos Santos Sports Complex Pretty’ed Up

Involving lotsa elbow grease, trips to the dump, and an ocean of paint

BY KATIE THOMPSON

There’s a new superhero in Todos Santos, but he doesn’t look like the superheroes from the movies or comics. With a shaved head, bright blue eyes, and glasses that he fiddles with when he talks, Thorp Minister isn’t sporting six-pack abs or science-fiction type fighting skills. No webs come out of his hands. Instead, he wields a paint brush, and he’s taken his muscle to the basketball stadium on Topete St. in the heart of Todos Santos, spending a year and a half and more than $3,000 of his own money to clean and paint this recreational space for the kids of this Pueblo Magico.

According to Minister, before he began his crusade, the out stadium had received no funding and had not been cleaned or painted in over 10 years. “The place was a disaster,” said Minister. “We took 18 loads of trash to the dump; I hired five guys for three days to help clean and took nine huge plastic bags of recyclable stuff to La Paz. It was embarrassing. This was a government building, with all this usage and no running water. Vandals had even stolen the water lines, 10 or 15 years ago.” Of course the bathrooms in this concrete court hadn’t functioned in years.

Having worked in film and music video production in Los Angeles and Las Vegas, Minister first became aware of the court when he was looking for a venue to host a large music act in conjunction with a friend’s food and wine festival. The music act didn’t work out, but Minister was hooked as soon as he saw it. “People thought I was nuts. A guy came up to me and said, ‘You’re not even from here. Why are you doing this?’ No one thought I could do it, but I did fix it. One of the things I learned through this whole process is great things happen when ordinary people give great effort every day over a long period of time, and that’s exactly what happened.”

A year and a half ago, he started by picking up some trash every morning. The venue is large, with a stage big enough to host a large band, sports courts on the floor for boxing, volleyball, basketball or soccer, and some skateboarding rails scattered around as well. The eight rows of concrete seating encircle the entire auditorium. This would be a huge job. And Minister realized he’d have to do it by himself.

First, though, he learned he needed signatures from the community stating that there was a need to clean and repaint the auditorium. “Todos Santos is the (political) step child of La Paz; they control the purse strings,” said Minister. “I hate politics, I hate jumping through hoops, but I did it anyway. They told me to get 200 signatures, I got 2,800. I went to all the schools and got all the kids to sign. I submitted it to the mayor of Todos Santos, then sent another set to La Paz.”

One day, in November of 2013, as Minister was picking up garbage, he noticed two workers from La Paz working almost alongside him. “They spent two full days measuring and recording on graph paper, very detailed,” said Minister. “I was like, who are these guys? What’s going on?” Minister thought...
maybe folks from La Paz would move forward with the project.

But February of 2014 rolled around and still, nothing had happened. Minister got more and more frustrated with graffiti, especially on the front wall, facing the main street. “I was really discouraged, I felt like (this project was) really losing momentum,” said Minister. “So, the first week in April, I paint (that wall) myself. Damn wall cost me $250, for eight gallons of paint. I painted it white with a teal stripe, a hot color.” What he didn’t realize is that people were watching him and he had just painted the concrete structure in the colors of the opposing political party.

Five days later, while Minister continued to paint, another painter, a Mexican named Geraldo, showed up from La Paz and began to paint as well. Minister wondered who he was, but shrugged it off and they both kept painting. On April 25, 2014, as Minister was helping clean the venue for a boxing event, he met Abel Sandoval. “There was this impeccably dressed guy,” Minister remembers, “and I’m thinking who is this guy? He reeks of money. His name is Sandoval, and he’s some political guy in La Paz.” According to Minister, Sandoval told him that he wanted to paint the whole place in three weeks, that he wanted to bring in the Governor of BCS on May 15th. “He wanted the bathrooms and the concession stand renovated. You got to prep it, paint it twice,” explained Minister. “And he said, ‘I want to paint it burnt orange and tan.’ We argued, in a nice way, for about an hour.” The compromise: three colors, white, tan and teal. And still, Minister kept painting, day after day, until the middle of May.

Thorpe Minister almost by himself brought new life to the Todos Santos sports stadium.

Not surprisingly, the May 15th date for the Governor’s visit was pushed back indefinitely. According to Minister, “The paint part was done but the bathrooms weren’t; they had to totally demo those, it was such a disaster.”

Now, six months later, the bathrooms are done, but they remained locked. “The kids need the bathrooms,” complained Minister. “There needs to be a public bathroom. They spent all this money fixing the bathrooms and now they are locked up all the time.” Why, then, did they renovate the bathrooms? “That’s the million dollar question,” concedes Minister.

The stadium is now clean, painted and renovated, and the community is grateful, especially to Minister. Townsfolks, both Mexican and Gringos, have been working to create and fund a plaque honoring Minister and his work, to be placed on the property.

Stefano Velasquez Lopez, a young man from Todos Santos, works at Cafelix, where Minister hangs out. According to him, (translated from Spanish) Minister is “a very generous person, a good person, a hard worker. He persevered. All of the money came out of his pocket. It was impressive. I think it’s really important. A lot of people go there, there are lots of sports there.” Another young woman who also works there pantomimed playing volleyball and gave Minister a huge smile.

“The irony,” said Minister with a smile, “is that since I did it, people in town think I’m Elvis, the greatest thing since sliced bread.” He hasn’t been, and isn’t expecting to be, reimbursed the money he spent on this project. And he wanted to acknowledge the help he received from Hector Gonzalez Soria, the owner of the local Comex paint store. “He was my shrink,” said Minister. “When I wanted to give up, he supported me.”

In the end, Minister acknowledged that one of the most motivating things about the whole process was that “there were a lot of middle aged guys, born and raised in Todos Santos, who confided in me that, when they were kids, they wished that the stadium was as nice as it is now.”,