

BY DEREK OPERLE DOPERLE@PADUCAHSUN.COM Fundraising toward McCracken County Judge-Executive Craig Clymer's water tower unity mural is over halfway done, the official told The Sun Tuesday. A pair of hands — one black, one white — clasped over an American flag beside the words "United We Stand" is slated to be painted onto the municipally-owned water tower off the westbound portion of Interstate 24, immediately opposite Arant Confederate Park in Reidland — where a Confederate flag flies alongside the highway on privately owned land. With \$16,500 in direct donations from local organizations and institutions and just over \$2,000 committed through a GoFundMe campaign, Clymer has raised a total of \$18,530 toward the mural. "We're going to have about \$30,000 in costs it looks like, so we're needing about another \$11,000. I just sent out yesterday some solicitations for some more money ... we still have some people out there I think who are going to give generously," Clymer said. "We've asked for donations from a few of the larger entities around but not all of them. I know there's some fairly sizable corporate donations that are going to be coming in." Muralist Eric Henn will paint the tower. His quoted fee is \$18,500. The only additional costs for the project will be a lift to take Henn up to the water tower's height (around \$11,000) and paint (around \$1,000), Clymer said. The official has considered one change to the mural's design, adding the county's website. "It's so that people that drive by see it and maybe they'll be curious and they'll click on our website and we'll have them some information there about the story behind it. Just a general description of why it's there," Clymer said. "Maybe through that people can see what's actually here and maybe they'll stop or get a little fuel or a sandwich or maybe they'll come downtown and see what our community's about. Pique their curiosity. "Kind of like fishing, you throw that lure out there and give them a twitch, you know. Maybe we can catch some people and bring them in here to see what we have to offer." All of the funds for the project come from donations. Paducah-McCracken County NAACP president J.W. Cleary played a big role in recruiting early donors to the project, soliciting contributions from a number of local leaders. So far a number of local groups have made contributions, including Bacon Farmer Workman Engineering (\$500), Bryant Law Center (\$1,000), CSI Inc. (\$2,500), the Labor Union (\$1,000), Mercy Health (\$1,000), Murray State University (\$1,000), Paducah Bank (\$1,000), Paducah-McCracken County NAACP (\$1,000), P&L Railroad (\$500), Sons of Confederate Veterans (\$500) and West Kentucky Community and Technical College (\$1,000). WKCTC president Anton Reece committed \$1,000 out of his annual allotment from the Paducah Junior College Foundation. He believes that the project is vital, as it will help advertise the area's values and "what the broader community represents" when it comes to inclusivity. "One of the things that I think is central to the discussion and debate about the importance of this symbol of unity and progress is that there are literally thousands of people that commute along I-24 in both directions every day," Reece said. "You just never know who's traveling, right? Meaning that we can tie it in with economic development, recruiting for education, jobs, etc." Mark Bryant, an attorney with Bryant Law Center, thinks the tower will "confer a great message about unity instead of the politics of division." "In all my years in Paducah, we have handled diversity and integration as well as any community I have heard of. I want to see that continue," Bryant added. "Two weeks

ago I drove from Paducah to Gatlinburg, Tennessee, then through North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida and saw only one confederate flag the entire trip, Paducah.” Clymer is overall satisfied with the fundraising progress so far and hopes to have the project complete sometime this summer. Anyone interested in donating to the mural project can visit www.gofundme.com/f/mccracken-county-unit-ed-we-stand-message.