



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Unmasking Brain Injury Art Exhibit on Display in Downtown Missoula *During First Friday Art Walk at the Public House*

(Missoula, MT) – A new and vibrant art exhibit, “Unmasking Brain Injury” featuring masks created by Montana brain injury survivors, caregivers and healthcare professionals will be on display during First Friday’s Art Walk at The Public House, located at 130 E. Broadway from 5-8 pm.

The traveling art exhibit was launched in March during Brain Injury Awareness month and has visited Helena and Billings before its arrival in Missoula. “The mission of the “Unmasking Brain Injury” is to educate Montanans about the prevalence of brain injury, and to give survivors a voice and a means to share what it’s like to live with a brain injury, said John Bigart III, Executive Director of Brain Injury Alliance of Montana (BIAMT). “There’s a story behind every mask and behind every mask there’s a person that’s been touched by a brain injury,” added Bigart.

Some of the artwork stories shared by survivors on display at The Public House include these:

- *I still feel broken. I may look fine on the outside but inside my brain is still healing and I still have problems.*
- *I feel gifted, as I am still here. Now all I have to do is figure out how to give others the help and hope that I have found. My mask shows my confusion and understanding of the many questions that have bothered my thinking.*
- *The dinosaur means that I’m “old school.” The snail means I’m “mentally slow compared to before my injury.” The heart means “the love of my family for me.”*

Bigart explained that, “Brain injuries often are referred to as ‘invisible injuries’. The survivor looks the same, and everything on the surface seems normal, but there is something different that often can’t be pinned-down.”

“The need for education is essential,” said Bigart. Montana toggles between second and third in the nation per capita for brain injury related death; and on average 33 Montanans sustain a brain injury each day and live but with sustained injuries. “These are tough statistics and demonstrate we live in a state where people work and play hard,” said Bigart. The BIAMT is committed to its mission of helping brain injury survivors and their caregivers. “We strive to be an essential educational resource,” added Bigart.

The BIAMT is the only non-profit organization in Montana that is dedicated solely to helping individuals and families that have been impacted by brain injury. It works year-round to promote brain injury awareness, advocacy and prevention, and provides free helmet giveaways statewide.

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For more information about the “Unmasking Brain Injury” art exhibit, First Friday’s event and the BIAMT, please contact: John Bigart III, Executive Director, Brain Injury Alliance Montana. Phone: (406) 541-6442; e-mail: john_b@biamt.org; Website: www.biamt.org