

'Unk P' Mural Unveiled in North Philly: A Community Hero in Full Color

The Unk P mural celebrates a local legend's legacy of mentorship, care, and community power—designed by Nile Livingston with Mural Arts Philadelphia.

PHILADELPHIA, PA, UNITED STATES, August 2, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On a vibrant July afternoon, the corner of 2600 Ridge Avenue came alive with memory, connection, and celebration. Community members gathered outside Kirby Mac & Pete's Rocks Professional Barbershop for the public unveiling of a powerful new mural honoring Paul "Unk P" Gripper—a mentor, coach, father figure, and beloved presence in North Philadelphia.

Designed by [Nile Livingston](#), Founder & CEO of [Creative Repute](#), in partnership with [Mural Arts Philadelphia](#), this vibrant, comic-style mural honors Gripper as "a beloved basketball coach, father figure, and community hero"



The completed Unk P mural by Nile Livingston stretches across the wall at 2600 Ridge Avenue showcasing bold comic-style art celebrating Paul Gripper's life and impact

A Relatable Hero Built on Presence and Action

Paul Gripper's impact wasn't rooted in fame—but in approachable, everyday mentorship. Neighbors remember him driving kids to games, offering meals, and supporting youth in their academic and athletic journeys.

During the dedication, his daughter Ashley Gripper reflected on both his legacy and his passing, noting how medical neglect, systemic racism, and ableism in the healthcare system contributed to his death during the early pandemic. "In his final years, our dad stepped fully into the role of

mentor. He was selfless and caring... When dozens from his basketball family showed up at his burial despite public health limits, I realized our grief wasn't just ours—it was collective."

Elected Officials Join the Tribute Councilmember Isaiah Thomas (At-Large, Majority Whip), a longtime youth advocate and coach, spoke at the ceremony, linking Gripper's grassroots impact to broader citywide efforts to foster mentorship through athletics and community art.

Councilmember Jeffery "Jay" Young, Jr. (5th District, covering much of North Philadelphia) also addressed the gathering. As a local resident and community advocate, he praised the mural as a model of civic engagement and youth-centered legacy-building.

Design That Speaks Volumes

The mural's comic-book aesthetic features Paul holding his three children and a trophy beneath a Byzantine-style halo that includes an illustration of his late ex-wife and supporter, Dawn. The "UNK P" lettering floats like balloons—echoing images shared during his memorial—and a quote from Paul anchors the mural: "If the kids call you Unk or OG, it's your job to keep them from making bad decisions."

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Paul Gripper

Bold patterns inspired by African diaspora textiles add cultural texture and vibrancy to the piece.

Made With the Community, For the Community

Over 1,000 residents signed a petition to support the project. A Community Paint Day, coordinated by Project Manager Donnell Powell, invited locals to help paint in-studio color sections. At the unveiling, attendees used paint markers to sign their names into silhouettes at the base—turning the mural into a living archive of shared history and gratitude.

Crafted With Care

Fabricated using the parachute cloth method, panels were painted indoors and installed onsite



Community members gather outside Kirby Mac & Pete's Rocks Barbershop for the unveiling of the Unk P mural designed by artist Nile Livingston in North Philadelphia

with Nova Gel adhesive, providing an air-pocket-free finish. The team was led by Keisha Whatley, with assistance from Sydney Carter, Tom Walsh, and interns Jordan and Kenzie. The final steps included sealing for long-term protection and marking a joyful unveiling with family, neighbors, and civic leaders.

Why This Mural Stands Apart
Philadelphia is known for its murals—but this piece is unique in its emotional resonance, cultural context, and grassroots authorship. It honors a man who lived in service and whose influence continues to ripple through neighborhood life.

“Whether or not you knew him personally, Paul Gripper’s spirit continues to resonate and make a positive impact,” said Nile Livingston. “This mural reflects the power of mentorship, the strength of family, and the beauty of community care.”

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Confetti fills the air as the Unk P mural designed by Nile Livingston is officially unveiled on Ridge Avenue with family friends Councilmembers Isaiah Thomas and Jeffery Young Jr and North Philly community members



Ashley Gripper, Joey Gripper, and Naima Gripper participate in a Community Paint Day for the Unk P mural, collaborating with artist Nile Livingston to bring Paul Gripper's legacy to life through vibrant public art in North Philly



Mural Arts Philadelphia

UNK P: Legendary Coach, Father, and Friend.

Mural by: Nile Livingston

A winning submission of our public mural application process, this project honors the life of Paul "Unk P" Gripper, a North Philadelphia community member who inspired and mentored young men—many of whom garnered entrance and scholarship to college—through the game of basketball. Paul was described as a larger-than-life figure, known for his loud, braggadocious personality. He embodied the spirit of Philadelphia—always cracking jokes and having fun, often silly but uplifting. Paul had a heart as big as his stature and was considered "a teddy bear with street smarts" by those closest to him. He often wore sneakers or Timberland boots. He was a beloved basketball coach and a father figure to many young people in the community.

LEAD PRODUCTION ARTIST: Keisha Whatley, Custom Arts Studio LLC.
ASSISTED BY: Sydney Carter & Thomas Walsh
FUNDERS: City of Philadelphia
PARTNERS: Team Gripper LLC & Kirbymack's Professional Barber Salon
SPECIAL THANKS: Judith Gripper, Naima Gripper, Ashley Gripper, Joey Gripper, Kirby Ames, Ike Franks, Jordan Hines, Sidney McQueen, William Mills, Emanuel Mills Sr., Jonathan Morris, Lisa Turner, Michael Whittington, and McKenzie Wright
PROJECT MANAGER: Donnell Powell



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Mural Vinyl Credit Panel Mural Artist Nile Livingston
Mural Unk P Designer

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