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New murals at Brunswick grocery store promote fresh produce, Midcoast Hunger Prevention Program

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Artist Michael Branca explains his piece, "Abundance I," hanging in the Hannaford cafe. (Hannah LaClaire / The Times Record)

BRUNSWICK — In Michael Branca's newest paintings, color, "joy, wonder and transformation" are in abundance. Fresh Maine produce spills from a backpack and tumbles down rolling hills as a child chases a butterfly flitting toward the edge of the frame in "Abundance I." In "Abundance II," the same backpack, still overflowing, sits on a stoop, set down by the girl, inspired by Branca's own daughter, Juniper. The two paintings are part of a series of public artworks, focused on local food insecurity, unveiled at Hannaford on Friday.

Branca's two paintings are featured near the entrance and in the new Hannaford cafe, while another piece by Artists' Rapid Response Team hangs outside and 11 smaller panels painted by 10 Brunswick High School students are placed atop the store's interior entryways.

Branca's work was inspired by local agriculture and the work done by Midcoast Hunger Prevention Program.

"Despite all this abundance, there are still people who don't have enough," he said.

According to the Food Research and Action Center, between 2014 and 2016, more than 16% of Maine households struggled to put food on the table.

This year, Midcoast Hunger Prevention Program, soup kitchen and food pantry, saw an increase in visitors, serving more than 4,000 people in 1,500 visits to the food bank in March and April.

"People are having to make tough choices" between rent, heat, food and other costs, Executive Director Karen Parker said.

Food insecure families and people with low incomes are more vulnerable to poor nutrition, obesity and other health-risk factors, in part because of lack of access to healthy and affordable foods, according to a report from the Food Research and Access Center.

Deborah King, executive director of the Brunswick Downtown Association said the murals were "not only beautiful, but very meaningful."

This, according to Susan Weems, director of Brunswick Public Art, is one of the things that art, especially beautiful art can do — draw attention to issues and engage the community.

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