

turning it into a controlled, sterile habitat. Everyone has the right to walk a city street, but you can be thrown out of a shopping mall and told never to come back. Just imagine a few years down the line, when all of downtown is carpeted and closed off. No more unregulated people."

Nevertheless, Davies views current redevelopment plans for downtown with cautious optimism. He is particularly enthusiastic about the recent resurgence in funding for downtown murals, now being administered through the Downtown Committee.

Generating funds from a special tax assessment on downtown properties, the committee has, since 1979, sponsored a whole series of murals by local artist Andy Matlow. The program shows every sign of continuing and expanding in the years to come. "As soon as I finish one mural, I start getting requests for another one," Matlow says. "People are really interested."

"The feedback has been great," agrees Michael Quigley, deputy director of the Downtown Committee. "Murals add to the uniqueness of downtown. It's a way to make drab areas more attractive and more fun."

People's Artist

At 44, Davies' unruly red beard is now streaked with gray, and when he sits, his ample belly strains and tugs at his faded, rainbow-colored suspenders.

Yet, despite the appearance of comfortable middle age, he is far from complacent. Time, graffiti and redecoration have taken their toll on many of Davies' muralistic creations, but nothing has dampened the rebellious and critical spirit which has placed him so solidly in the tradition of the "people's artists" of America's inner cities. In an age dominated by cynical self-interest, Davies remains openly and unabashedly committed to changing society through his art.

"1984 has become such a buzz-word in people's minds," Davies reflects. "Maybe people will actually use this year to increase their awareness about government intervention in private thoughts. I want to do my part to help that along." □

(Anyone interested in buying or commissioning a work by Jeff Davies can contact the artist at 132 Harvard Pl., Syracuse, NY 13210; (315) 474-0150.)

*AN ENORMOUS TALENT—
Big Jeff in his Westcott Nation
studio. (Michael Davis photo)*

