

Writing: Membership Newsletter

From car to canvas: Senior Promise member's love for racing, marketing shine through his art

MANY YEARS AGO, 9-year-old Gary Dausch sat on the sofa with his grandmother, flipping through the pages of a picture book, when something captured his attention. A photo of a truck covered in lettering drew him in.

“Cannonball” was a nickname Gary’s great-uncle, Erwin Baker, earned during his days racing motorcycles and cars, both locally and across the country. His most celebrated win came in 1909 at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway: Cannonball Baker won the very first race held at the most famous racetrack in the world. Later, Baker would be hired to travel across the country to promote motorcycles and cars by Stutz, Duesenberg and others.

That moment on the couch was the beginning of a personal passion and accomplished career for Gary. As years passed, he began racing himself. He became interested in how cars worked. He restored cars for fun. And he began paying attention to how a product’s typography and design worked together to motivate people to buy.

After studying art and education in college and beginning his career, Gary became fascinated with the marketing behind the racing industry. On a whim, he contacted racing team owner Derrick Walker, looking for an opportunity to merge his passions for racing and marketing. Six months later, while planning a business move to Indianapolis, Walker returned his call. The two would work together for the next 15 years.

“I had my love of race cars and my love of art, and (here) was an opportunity to bring them together,” says Gary, now a volunteer for Franciscan St. Francis Health’s Service Excellence department and a member of Senior Promise.

As marketing director for Walker Racing, Gary designed everything the team needed to promote itself, including sales materials, uniforms and race

cars, as well as business partnerships between car sponsors. One of only a handful of race team marketers in the country who was doing both the business and art portions of the job, with equal talent and success, Gary was putting in long hours. And while he loved his job, his personal projects were put on hold – until he was able to move into retirement in 2008.

“Immediately, I went into building race cars,” says Gary. By doing so, he gained an appreciation for the details of car design. He knew which kinds of fittings, screws, rivets and other small pieces were used in which areas and for what reason. He knew which parts were carbon fiber, which ones were ceramic-coated and which ones changed in appearance when the car became heated during racing.

With his creative passion always on his mind, Gary again brought art and racing together, this time by crafting detailed, high-quality paintings of the cars with which he had been working for years. His first painting was meant to be a personal way to remember his preretirement work with and love of the racing industry, specifically cars that he had designed as part of his work with Walker Racing. But it attracted the attention of others in the industry, who wanted copies for themselves, and Gary found himself enjoying a new line of work.

Gary doesn’t describe his work as a business. “It’s an active hobby that is intense and maybe a little bit out of control,” he says. But word-of-mouth has sparked a modest following for his paintings. Each one requires between 150 and 200 hours to complete, and all include intricate details familiar, perhaps, only to those who have built, designed, raced or maintained the cars themselves. “That’s part of the magic, I think, in what I’m doing,” says Gary. “I’ve actually touched these parts, and I want them to look real. It’s kind of like I am building the car” as he paints, he says.

Today, his original paintings hang in the homes of some of the racing industry’s most well-known individuals, including drivers Will Power and Alex Tagliani, and team owners Derrick Walker and Roger Penske. Limited-edition prints (about 50 of each painting) make his art more affordable for a wider audience, but because of the amount of time it takes to complete one painting, he’s not quite ready to officially open for business.

It’s not out of the question, however, that that day will come. “In the next two years or so, I’ll be looking toward making it a business,” he says. He is currently building an inventory of completed paintings, so that when he does open for business, he’ll have a depth of work to share.

In the meantime, it’s about enjoying the art form. “I think the real point is, I feel like I’ve been blessed to take my mechanical interests and my art interests and put them together to do something I love to do,” he says.



WRITING
Newsletter
Article:
Feature

CLIENT
Franciscan
Health

