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# A clear calling

## Stained glass artist finds home and success in San Pedro

By Dennis Lim

MORE SAN PEDRO

Some artists use a canvas and paint to make their works. Some use stone and a chisel. Mark Schoem uses old glass, steel and a soldering iron.

A San Pedro-based stained glass artisan, Schoem's work — a mesh of bright glass and slim steel rails holding the kaleidoscope of color together — can be found decorating houses, churches and businesses throughout San Pedro and Southern California.

Head to Mary Star, Mount Sinai Baptist Church, Good Sheppard Lutheran and Green Hills Chapel to catch a glimpse of his work.

His works can also be found around the world. One of his projects is a stained glass display for

a newly built church in American Somoa.

But this year marks a special time in Schoem's career. It's his 25th year in business as a stained glass artisan, the majority of that time has been spent at his store front on Seventh Street.

"This is what I do," Schoem said. "It's not a hobby or something I do on the side as a project. It's my job and my passion. Whatever job I get I go full tilt in because I love this."

Before becoming a stained glass artisan, Schoem was well on his way to becoming a psychologist. He was enrolled in the doctorate program for psychology at USC when he decided to pursue a passion he discovered accidentally.

Taking art classes as a hobby, Schoem found he liked the look and creativity involved with making stained glass more than working in psychology.

After some soul-searching, Schoem quit the doctorate program and began working for local artisans.

After three years, he felt he was ready to start his own business and began selling works out of his garage.

By 1983, he rented a store front on Seventh Street, before it became a hub for artists.

Times were hard in the early days. Jobs got scarce at times.

The Philadelphia native said he never went hungry, but there were times he just sat around his store waiting for a client to walk in.

But these days, Schoem said he is rarely without work and typically has six to seven projects at once.

But after 25 years, what keeps a man coming back to the same job day after day?

"I think it's just the most beautiful art form in the world,"

the 56-year-old said waving his hand toward a brightly lit piece of his gleaming in the afternoon sun. "Don't you agree? It has this incredible look and classic feel you can't find in other art forms."

There's also the satisfaction that comes with working with a client to get a job done and seeing their smiles when everything is finished.

"They enjoy it," he said. "It becomes part of someone's life. The end result is just so joyful. In psychology, even if things get better for the patient they usually aren't that happy and when things go wrong, they go really wrong. People just appreciate this a lot more."

Satisfaction is a trait that's common among Schoem's customers.

"Let me put it this way," said Rico Castagnola who commissioned Schoem to design nine windows for his San Pedro house in December. "Everyone's been knocking on my door ever since I got them and asking where I got it. When I tell them, they can't believe someone does this locally."

From the *Daily Breeze*,  
*More San Pedro*,  
Saturday, June 4, 2005

# WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY

Former psychologist turns stained-glass hobby into life work

By Betsy Beglan  
BUSINESS WRITER

At the turn of the millennium, while businesses around the globe toasted "High-Technology Renaissance" and the "Advent of the Internet," Mark Schoem, who doesn't need a computer to work, celebrated 20 years of working, basically, in the Dark Ages.

At 51, Schoem, owner of Ancient Arts stained-glass studio in "old town" San Pedro, describes himself as one of those people who enjoys the artistic process of creating a thing of beauty that will last for ages.

From the old wooden work tables that sprawl the length of his storefront studio across its pock-marked concrete floor, Schoem draws his designs, cuts his patterns and glass, fits the lead around the pieces, solders the joints and supports the frame.

Hundreds of Schoem's patterns and blueprints, looking like antiquities from Leonardo da Vinci's day, are drawn on yellowed and fraying rolls of vellum parchment paper that collect in boxes beside the tables.

But Schoem has not always worked as an artist.

As career choices go, 20 years ago, Schoem could have been another California psychologist administering to some of the state's colorful clientele.

After receiving his master's of psychology from Temple University in Philadelphia, and practicing for three years in Virginia, Schoem packed up his couch and headed West to pursue his doctoral degree in psychology from USC.

It was 1976, and by the next year, his gradually decreasing interest in the day-to-day grind of working in a helping profession would begin turning his rose-colored glasses toward stained glass.

After three years of training and apprenticing in the art of stained glass, Schoem opened Ancient Arts in 1980, one of San Pedro's few stained-glass studios.

Having earned less than \$10,000 working as a state psychologist in Virginia in the '70s, Schoem's first year of revenues in his artistic hobby-turned-profession actually rose to \$15,000.

Celebrating his 20th anniversary and having earned more than \$100,000 in revenues in 1999, Schoem says he still does not regret leaving the psychology profession to devote his life to stained glass. He says that he has simply found another venue to make himself and others happy.

With most of his 100 clients being church clergy and cemetery mausoleum managers in California, Schoem, who is Jewish, said that his experience with different houses of worship has taught him a lot about religion, and that he treats all of his projects with respect.

"It's elevating to be a part of it," Schoem said. "We are living in an ecumenical age."

Schoem has made and repaired stained, beveled and etched glass windows for churches like Mary Star of the Sea in San Pedro, Rolling Hills Covenant Church in Rolling Hills Estates and Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Rancho Cucamonga.

In 1994, Ancient Arts was commissioned by the McClesky Construction Co., builders of mausoleums throughout the United States, to make a stained glass window of the "Wailing Wall" in Jerusalem for a mausoleum at Mount Lebanon Cemetery in Glendale (Queens), N.Y.

He has done a series of windows showing some of New Jersey's nature scenes at the Garden of Memories Mausoleum, a nondenominational mausoleum, at Cedar Park Cemetery in Paramus, N.J.

While half of his clients ask him to create new



BRAD GRAVERSON/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

San Pedro stained-glass artist Mark Schoem has been creating new designs for 20 years. Most of his clients are church clergy and cemetery mausoleum managers.

designs for their windows, door panels, skylights or partitions, the other half need restoration and repair of broken or aged windows.

When it comes to restoration and repair, Schoem says he tends to be more concerned and dedicated to matching and saving the original than some of his clients. Using glass distributors in Orange County, New York or the Bay Area, he always tries to match an exact color and texture, which is not always possible, especially when glass has gone through a hand-painted glazing process. Schoem has occasionally commissioned free-lance artists in New Hampshire to paint glass for special restoration projects.

Schoem usually has had at least one assistant to help with the 10 ongoing projects he works on at a time, totaling roughly 100 projects per year. He charges between \$300 and \$100,000 depending on the size and location of the job.

"I enjoy what I'm doing and get more satisfaction than I did working in psychology," Schoem said. "The finished product is beautiful and people love looking at it."

Do you know of a South Bay or Harbor Area business that is unique, creative or cutting edge? Fax a brief description of the business or company and the names of the owners to *Daily Breeze*, Business Section, 310-540-6272.

From the *Daily Breeze*,  
Monday, May 8, 2000