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Houma native's motorcycle art opens many doors

THAD ANGELLOZ

Staff Writer

Marshall Canafax knows all about the "starving artist" syndrome.

That's because he lived it.

The Houma native spent years airbrushing T-shirts locally.

Over time he opened a screen print shop, set up a booth at a flea market and traveled the country selling his items at state fairs.

All along, Canafax pursued a side hobby.

Instead of T-shirts, Canafax did some airbrush work on vehicles, including motorcycles.

He soon found he enjoyed this form of art more than handling T-shirts all day.

"I mean how many T-shirts can you airbrush before you get burnt out," Canafax said. "I did thousands and thousands of shirts and I got to the point where I peaked out with it."



This is an example of the flames Canafax often airbrushes onto his motorcycles.

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Wanting a change of scenery, Canafax woke up one day and decided to head west.



'ROCKY MOUNTAIN HIGH'

According to Canafax, he left a stable job making a descent living for him and his family in search of more.

His search eventually led him to Colorado.

Once he arrived, he got busy looking for work.

The only thing he was sure about was the amount of potential business that existed in his new surroundings.

"You wouldn't believe how many motorcycles you'll find on the front range," Canafax said. "That was one of the reasons I set up roots there."

This is one of the many patriotic scenes Canafax has airbrushed on his customers' motorcycles.

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Since he didn't know anyone, Canafax decided to take a part-time job at a local Harley-Davidson bike shop.

While he was starting to meet people, he made a decision that forever changed his life.

Canafax said he mad a promise to himself to work with some of the best airbrush artists in Colorado.

"Once I met them, I basically told them that we were going to work together," he said. "I remember telling them I wouldn't accept anything else other than a yes answer."

Once they agreed, Canafax formed a working relationship with some of the best artists around.

From that moment on, Canafax found himself getting steady work.

Eventually he became so busy he had to quit his part-time job.

"It just didn't make sense to keep it (job) anymore," Canafax said.

Canafax now works independently and is doing well.

He operates a shop inside his home in the middle of the mountains.

Along with customers of every age, nationality and occupation, Canafax also has worked on projects for Playboy, NASCAR and Intel.

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"I'm blessed," Canafax said. "To see where I'm at now is amazing. I'm living the dream."**TOUGH DAYS**

While he now finds himself living in a huge home with picturesque scenery all around him, Canafax remembers tougher times.

When Canafax speaks of his struggles, it makes one think back to a movie that was recently released.

"The Pursuit of Happyness," starring Will Smith as Chris Gardner, tells the story of a man who loses almost everything before realizing his dream.

Along the way he's forced to sleep in a subway bathroom with his son and must eke his way through life with almost no money.

Canafax suffered a similar fate before getting to where he's at now.

Some of his painful memories included having only \$2 in his wallet to feed his whole family with and bathing his children in a greyhound bus station.

Canafax explained how he had bought a used vehicle and transformed it into a makeshift camper to travel around the country in.

The camper didn't have running water or electricity.

"When I had to take a shower I would go to a truck stop," Canafax said. "Funny enough, I always tell people that without those experiences I would have never made it to where I'm at today."

Canafax said the most gratifying thing about his current success is the fact he endured when most would have quit.

"You have to understand that to become known takes years," he said. "You don't become known overnight no matter how talented you are. The only way it might be possible is if you win the lottery. Since that didn't happen to me, I had to work hard with the belief that something good would eventually come from it."**SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY**
The 56-year-old Houma native made a promise to himself when he left south Louisiana for good.

He told himself that he wouldn't lose the friendly, outgoing nature that people from our area of the country are known for.

"My granddaddy always told me to treat everyone like they are tired, thirsty and hungry," Canafax said. "I took my small town values with me when I came out west."

Canafax said his friendly nature has served him well in his current occupation.

"I've always had the confidence to know I can get along with anyone because of where I'm from," he said. "At first, some people are taken a back by it, but once they understand where you're coming from, they love it."

On a recent visit to a local supermarket, Canafax started talking to someone he'd never met.

"People from here aren't used to that, but seem to get a kick out of it once you engage them," he said.

Canafax explained that whenever someone comes into his shop to inquire about him doing work on their bike he doesn't even discuss it until he gets to know them as people.

"I'll cook for them and offer them a drink," Canafax said. "After a while, the people seem amazed that I haven't even asked them what there there for. I can't help myself because that's just the way I am. I don't think I'd be as successful if it weren't for my manners and hospitality."

Canafax said the people made it hard to leave Louisiana.

The Loveland, Colo., resident left his home state in 1996.

"There's no better folks than the one's that live down there," he said. "It's definitely not easy to walk away from that. My ultimate reason for leaving had to do with the business I was in. I knew because of the marketplace I wouldn't be able to take it (my business) any further without going somewhere else."**WHAT OTHERS SAY**
Canafax has developed a reputation based on what he likes to refer to as his "rolling art."

His customers swear he's one of, if not, the most-talented custom-bike artist around.

"He's got to be in the top three nationally," customer Jett McClendon said. "He's done several bikes for me and we've won lots of awards together at competitions. You'll never meet a better guy than Marshall."

One of his recent customers entrusted Canafax with a project that had special meaning to him.

Mike Duvall of Buhl, Idaho, found one of Canafax's business cards in a Harley-Davidson shop in Colorado.

Duvall had an image of what he wanted and met with Canafax to discuss his idea.

"My grandson passed away in 2004 and I wanted to pay tribute to him," Duvall said. "What he ended up doing for me is beyond words. The fine details makes him (grandson) literally come to life on my bike."

Duvall travels the country restoring homes.

In his estimation, he's been to all 50 states and hasn't seen anything that matches Canafax's work.

"I've been so impressed with him that I'm recommending him to my clients," Duvall said. "I figure he can go to their homes and paint wildlife scenes or whatever they may want."

Canafax's cousin, Guy Fanguy, said he's glad to see him doing so well.

Fanguy, who now works for the City of Thibodaux and resides in Bayou Blue, worked with Canafax for a few years in the early 1980s.

"I don't get to keep in touch with him as much as I'd like anymore, but I've seen his Web site and can tell he's grown as an artist," Fanguy said. "He's a very talented artist, and I'm glad his hard work has paid off for him."

To learn more about Canafax and view his work, visit www.mccustompaint.com.

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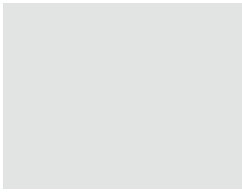
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