

Gatesville artist leaves day job to fulfill himself

By Don Bolding
Killeen Daily Herald

GATESVILLE — A couple of weeks ago, Robert Howell left a good job for a better one that he found in his storeroom.

It may not be better in terms of income right now, but he's a single father who wanted the flexibility to be with his two adolescent girls when they needed him, and he wanted a lifestyle vehicle to inspire them. He had painted acrylic murals as a part-time freelancer for years with about 50 works to

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his credit, and he's using that experience to make a full-time job of it under the name of Murals of Distinction.

"I had a good job with Laerdal in Gatesville — nothing to complain about — but its schedule always had to come first, and I was missing out on a lot of my kids' lives. Working for myself, except when I might be far away, I can interrupt a job to

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Herald/DAVID MORRIS
Original photo retouched

Robert Howell, a Gatesville-based mural painter, poses in front of his Memorial Christian Academy mural in the academy's office at 4001 Trimmer in Killeen.

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respond to my kids, and I can participate in their activities."

He's completed four or five paintings since he's been on his own and has a half-dozen more lined up.

Public response to a picture of a train right in front of an elevator at Scott & White Hospital in Temple played a part in convincing him to strike out on his own.

"That one exceeds 100 square feet, painted to match a bucolic scene reminiscent of the Old West," he said. "It catches patients and visitors by surprise when they step out of the fourth-floor elevator doors. The sight always generates a positive response, and hospital staff members commonly hear people making 'choo-choo' noises."

He is also planning some work with Hillcrest Hospital and the 1st Cavalry Museum on Fort Hood. He is working with an interior designer in Georgetown.

"It makes you nervous to leave a steady paycheck and step out on your own, but it's exciting. My kids are all the way behind it. My younger daughter looks for ways to help any way she can."

He's painted murals at home with inspirational quotes on the walls. Much of his work has been in residences, some of it small, such as pictures of butterflies.

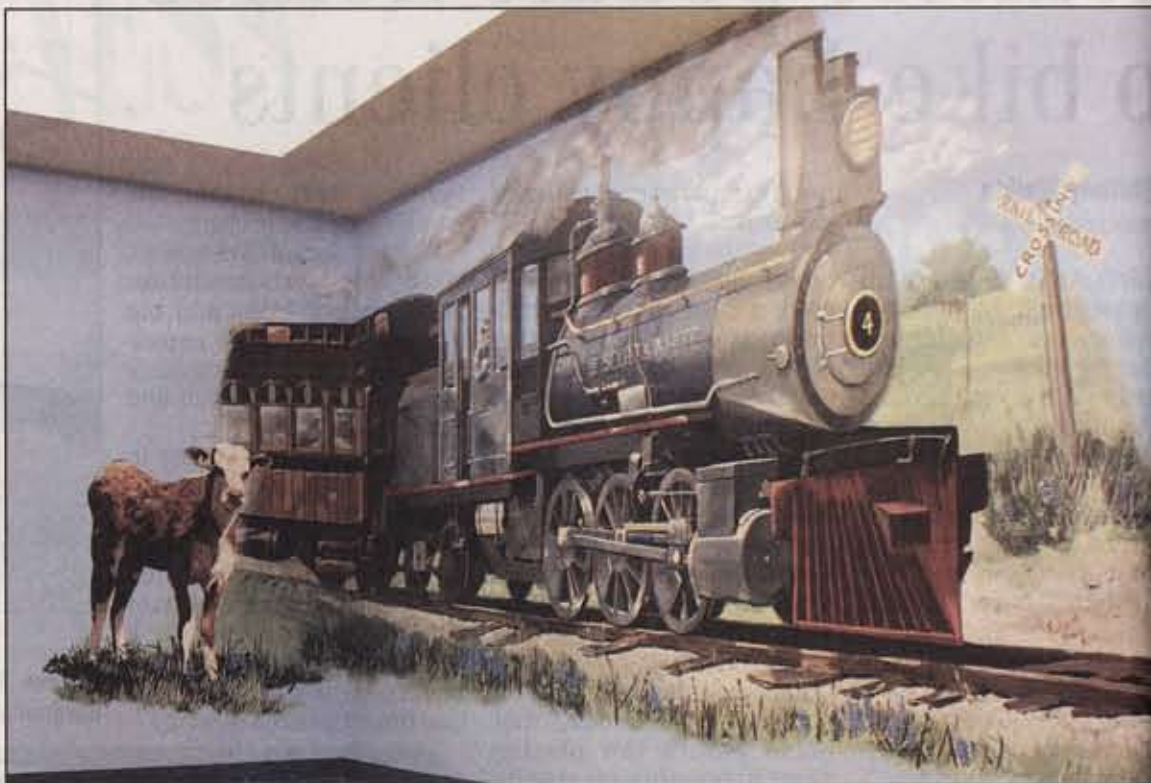
One family wanted a front-yard scene with a mailbox full of letters bearing the return addresses of their sons who are deployed in Iraq.

Other scenes include dinosaurs wrapped around three walls for boys' rooms and many still lifes.

"I paint realism," he says. "I prefer people and nature scenes, illustrations of life. My murals are one-of-a-kind works uniquely tailored to the desire of the client."

He was in artillery at Fort Hood from 1992 to 1997. A Kentucky native, he has a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Western Kentucky University.

He said he also offers trompe l'oeil, faux painting, portrait painting, canvas murals and graphic design. He said he will



Courtesy

People exiting an elevator on the fourth floor of Scott & White Hospital in Temple are greeted by this mural of a vintage locomotive. Robert Howell said reports of the public reception to the scene inspired him to try his hand as a full-time artist.

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Robert Howell

work anywhere in Central Texas including Killeen, Waco, Temple, Fort Hood, Round Rock, Cedar Park and Austin.

"Wall murals have become the hottest trend in home and office decorating and offer an affordable way to transform a home or business environment," he said. "It's a great field, and I'm teaching myself and my daughters self-confidence and optimism."

Howell can be reached at (254) 206-0843.

Contact Don Bolding at dbolding@kdhnews.com or (254) 501-7557.



The envelopes in this scene in a house in Nolanville bear the names of family members deployed to Iraq.

Courtesy photo