

They share it all when it comes to this business

By Alice Collins
staff writer

ABOUT A YEAR ago Gail and Richard Patterson loaded up their station wagon with their three children and all the items they planned to sell at a week-long art fair in Charlotte, N.C.

With all the luggage, displays and other travel necessities, "We looked like the Beverly Hillsbillies starting out," said Richard Patterson.

"We always travel with our children," said Gail Patterson. "We go to art fairs to sell, but we turn them into family vacations."

"The children love the motels and the swimming pools. And they help us at the fairs too."

The Pattersons don't often travel to art fairs as far away as North Carolina, but they sell their work at from seven to 10 fairs a year.

The Pattersons own Gail Christine Designs. They have no employees. They do everything themselves.

What started out as a hobby, turned into a profitable small business.

At the present time, the company designs, makes and sells stained-glass and oak shelves, mug racks and clothing racks for adults and children and light switch covers with designs silk screened on the wood.

THEY HAVE always been able to sell everything they make. Gail Christine Designs remains a small business only because — for now — that's the way the Pattersons want it.

A few years ago they had a taste of what it might be like if they expanded and they pulled back. They're not ready now to devote the time or energy required if they were to expand.

"Perhaps, after our children are grown, we might be ready," said Gail Patterson. "But now, we must have the time for them."

The Pattersons have three children — Kristy, 15; Shannon, 9; and Shaun, 5.

Richard Patterson is a full-time Birmingham police sergeant. "That's my career and my primary job," he said. "But because I work shifts, I have the time for our business."

The couple works out of their house in Royal Oak.

Gail Patterson creates all the designs. She makes the silk screens and

cuts the stained glass.

He does most of the bookkeeping, cuts the wood and does most of the silk screening. The rest of it, they share.

WORKING TOGETHER, as well as living together and sharing a marriage, has never been a problem for them, they say.

In fact, they consider it a benefit to their marriage and their family life.

"I feel it's strengthened us," he said. "A lot of firemen and police officers moonlight, so to speak. That takes them away from home even more than their rotating shifts do. It's led to high divorce rates."

"I can be in the garage working for about an hour. Then the kids come in and want to do something and I can just stop and go do it. That's the good thing about working at home," said Patterson.

"I enjoy it because I don't have to leave the children," Gail Patterson said. "And it's been healthy for our marriage."

They also credit the business with giving their children more confidence in themselves through helping out at the art booths, wrapping items, handling the money and being in contact with many people.

Because of the business, the Pattersons have also been able to provide extra for their children, like special music lessons and sending them to private school.

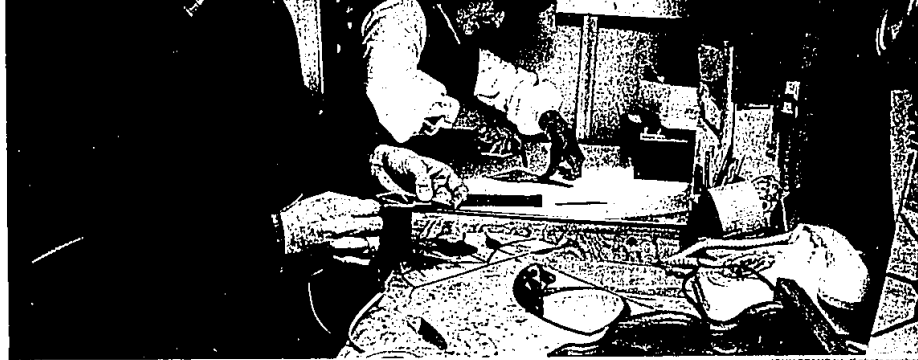
BOTH GAIL and Richard Patterson were members of artistic families. Both took a year-long design course at Highland Park Community College after high school.

After their first baby was born, Mrs. Patterson began painting pictures for the nursery "because I couldn't find what I wanted in the stores."

That led to others being interested in her work. Soon she was creating designs and painting them on wood with acrylics. "That's where my husband came into the picture," she said. "He began doing the woodwork."

"We started entering art fairs in 1972. The next year I put on two fairs myself, one in Berkeley and one in Birmingham in the Adams Square Shopping Center."

"At that point we couldn't keep up with the orders. I was hand painting ev-



JOHN STANO/staff photographer

Richard and Gail Patterson work together at their hobby that turned into a profitable small business. Working together has strengthened their marriage, they say.

TWOgether

erything," she continued. At that time they were making the clothing racks and light switch covers for children's rooms.

"**THE NEXT** year, we were doing an art fair when the exhibitor next to us saw that it was all done by hand and suggested there may be an easier way — silk screening."

"He sent us to a friend of his," said Mrs. Patterson. "This man, a total stranger, spent two hours with us, explaining the techniques. All he asked for in return were some of our pieces for his children's rooms. I readily agreed."

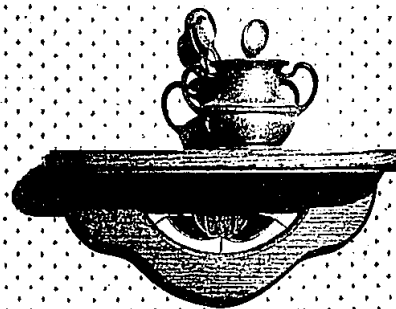
That was when their business really blossomed, she said. "I began to mass produce things. Instead of painting one design, I began doing hundreds of one design."

While she was in the process of making the silk screens, a manufacturer's representative became interested and wanted to represent them.

"We told her to go ahead," said Mrs. Patterson. "We didn't really know what to expect. She went out and began selling and came back with 50 orders, including the Jacobson's stores, even before I had the silk screens made. And that took months."

"**WE RENTED** a small building in Birmingham to do the silk screening. We were working half the night to fill the orders."

"We filled the Jacobson's order, then we realized we couldn't handle all this. It was the two of us, we weren't a factory."



The Pattersons create and sell oak clothing racks, mug racks and light-switch covers decorated with stained glass or silk screened designs.



Mary Lou Callaway

WHEN STANA CLAUS gets off his sleigh next Thanksgiving, where will he go?

We always knew where the real Santa was. He was at the downtown Hudson's, of course. Other Santas were assistants, helpers or aides.

But now that the Hudson's store will close around the beginning of the year, what will happen to all those memories?

I recently took one last trip to the once-magnificent store where we, our children and grandchildren, shared visits to Santa, the annual Christmas lunch and foot-weary shopping.

My earliest memory is at Hudson's in the days when a stiff-backed floorwalker in a dark suit and fresh boutonniere hated to see me coming in the Woodward entrance. He had to stop the revolving door to get me out and hand me over to a nervous mother.

That door was so wondrous, I trotted around it several times. Mother was terrified of the thing. I remember the stolen trips were worth the certain punishment.

Another temptation was the escalator. Mother didn't trust that either. I would escape her, hop on and ride up and down. Maternal threats didn't work. Mother solved the runaway problem by putting me in a little harness and holding the reins firmly. It's been hard to harness me ever since.

AFTER I FOUND out the truth about Santa, I didn't tell. That might have made the presents stop. It took none of the joy out of the Hudson's holiday.

I swear some of the same saleswomen are still there. One thanked us last week for expressing regrets over the store closing. But she backed away from further (perhaps too painful) conversation.

A younger woman said, "Oh, yes, we'll still have jobs. I'm hoping to go to Northland or Fairlane."

Not the same at a mall, lady. My friend Lois and I used to get a babysitter for our kids once a year and spend most of the day at that Hudson's.

We did every floor. We knew where every department was. We had so little cash then, we rarely purchased anything. But we managed lunch in the mezzanine tearoom or 13th floor dining room.

IN THOSE DAYS, deliveries were free. You could phone for an item, have it delivered and if it didn't suit you, the driver would come back and pick it up. No questions asked.

The elevators were a mixed thrill with that scary feeling in the stomach on the express to the top. Looking out through all those tall legs, I crouched in the rear half hoping the elevator would stop and half hoping it would keep going.

Last week we stopped at every floor, but now some are closed. We rode the escalators and the elevators and I took a few turns in the revolving door.

Our daughters Joan and Carol will remember Hudson's. But what about the grandchildren?

And what about my superstition that the turkey dressing I stuff into the bird every Thanksgiving won't taste right without watching the parade on television pass by Hudson's?

Where will Santa be?

I'll miss you Hudson's, and I feel the store closing is partly my fault. I've been shopping in the suburbs where the parking is free and the time spent minimal.

Christmas won't be the same.

Drains on way to being fixed

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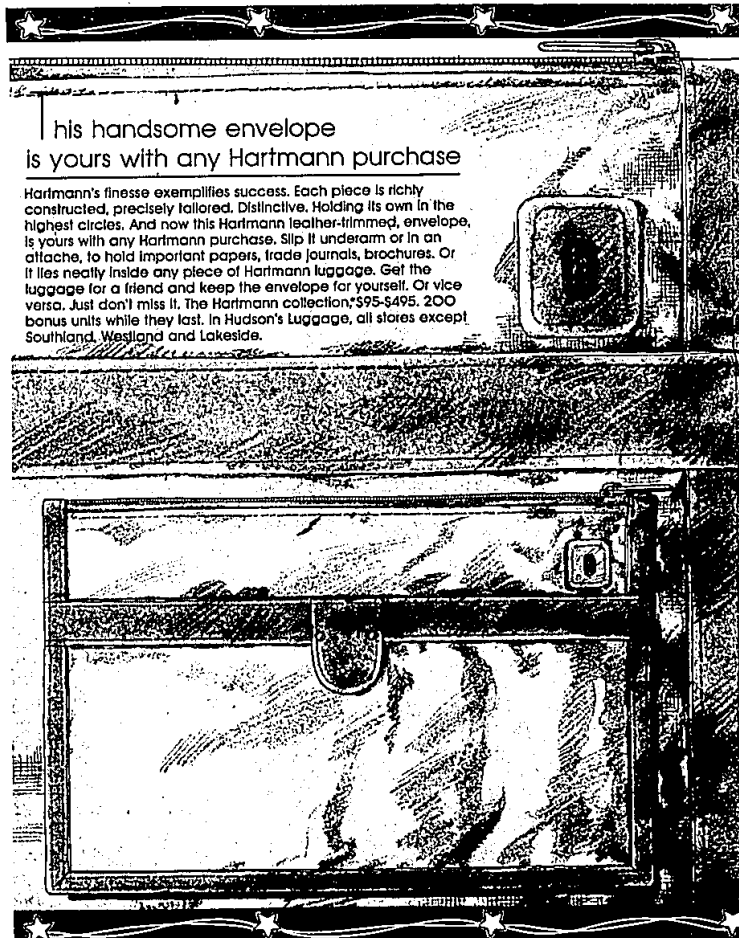
Financing looms as the largest obstacle to completion of the project.

Of the available options, a plan known as Chapter 20 appears most feasible, Blaisell said. To be discussed at the Jan. 26 hearing, it entails distributing costs among the involved cities, the county and state. Because of the Headlee Amendment, implementation of Chapter 20 financing has been deemed more difficult. Its legality currently is being tested in the courts, however, and Chapter 20 could emerge as the most workable financing method.

The city also must acquire land to complete the project.

It is the county's policy to condemn land, then reimburse the property owner for the loss. The city first attempts to purchase needed land by independently approaching land owners and asking them to sell their property, Blaisell said. The largest parcel the city intends to acquire is a 54-acre area west of Farmington Road between 10 and 11 Mile roads owned by Nicholas Spicer.

The Oakland County Drain Commission hopes to have most of the Caddell Drain construction contracted out by next spring. When completed, residences and businesses "will still experience flooding, but the severity will be reduced," he said.



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