Artist creates celestial designs of glass and rocks

By MARIO MAMALAKIS
Advertiser writer

Probably one of the busiest and happiest retired persons in Lafayette is Charles Bernard Jr.
The old cliche “busier than a one-arm paper hanger” could well apply to Bernard except that it is his two hands that are kept busy producing what is imaginative and creative mind motivates him to make.

Unique crafts items, such as rock art, wood art, the Wedding Book, an Acadian Heraldic Symbol, French poems on wooden plaques, a new born baby’s name announcement and its meaning, custom picture framing, painting on a five-layer glass creating multi-dimensional pictures, producing a replica of the Evangeline statue and a wooden toy box in the shape of an Alpine Cottage are a few of the items he creates.

Bernard has also traveled extensively, since his retirement taking note of craft items and needlework of the countries he visited and producing his own versions on his return home. He has visited Spain, Portugal, Austria, Holland, Switzerland, France, England, Ireland, Scotland, Italy, France, Greece, the island of Crete, Hawaii and Canada.

Stained Glass Windows
His latest stained glass work are two stained glass windows, which he gave to Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church. They have been installed in St. Mary’s Chapel at the church. The windows are 35 inches square. One window has the Greek letters “X” and “P”, the Greek abbreviation for “Christo” or “Christ”, the letters “A” and “M” for “Ava Maria” since the windows were created of the St. Mary’s Chapel.
The other window has a dove in its design, symbolic of the figure of the early spirit and a circle within a square. The colored glass used in these windows match that of the stained glass windows in the church. The transparent, opalescent stained glass of these windows are blue, yellow, red, green, amber and orange, matching the colors in the stained glass windows of the church.

Bernard has been working in stained glass for some 12 years now. Examples of his work are in his and other private homes.

Rock Art
Quite lovely “rock art” has also been created by Bernard. He uses flat rocks, Spanish moss, tree bark or drift wood to create these decorative items. Unusual expressions emerge from the faces he paints on the rocks. These are attached to a wall plaque or a piece of driftwood. The tree bark becomes the body on the plaque. To fit the face that has been created from the rocks. Spanish moss is glued to the bark in spots to add interest to the entire piece. The friendly faces mounted in such a way become without fail “conversion pieces”.

Bernard is also a master at wood art, which results in beautifully polished wood transformed into birds in flight or in repose and other interesting subjects. Some of these wood pieces are mounted on burlap and framed.

The Wedding Book
"The Wedding Book" is another popular bernard item. A book of the appropriate size and weight is selected and opened at mid point. The pages are glued so that the book remains open at this point. The wedding invitation is then glued to the open pages. Bernard imaginatively decorates and antiques the book and invitation.
The Baby’s Name Announcement
It was Shakespeare who penned the words “What’s In A Name?” But it is Bernard who became interested in the meaning of a name, especially as it relates to a new born baby. Bernard now produces a wood frame name announcement giving the meaning of a new baby’s name and embellishes it with art work in color. Needless to say both the Wedding Book and the Baby Name Announcements are prized possessions of their owners.

The Evangeline Statue
The thousands of people who have purchased the miniature replica of the Evangeline statue at Evangeline Park in St. Martinville probably do not know that Bernard produces them from a mold. The copyrighted mold is owned by Bernard’s uncle, D. Judice of St. Martinville. Bernard began making the statues after his uncle gave it up over 20 years ago.

The mold is a replica of the statue over the grave of Evangeline at the side of the St. Martin de Tours church in St. Martinville. Hollywood actress Dolores Del Rio gave the statue to the church following the filming of the movie “Evangeline” in St. Martinville in 1929. She was the star of the movie.

Acadian Heraldic Symbol
Proud of his Cajun heritage, Bernard has created a rich and handsome item, an Acadian Heraldic Symbol, in the form of a gold scroll topped by a crown using the Spanish castle and fleur-de-lis as symbols of this area’s heritage. This is mounted blue or red velvet and framed in a gold painted wooden frame.

A proud and true Acadian, Bernard is inspired to compose verses in French which he prints on paper and then decoupages it on a wooden plaque. To date he has the following poems on plaques: “J’aime le Cajun (I Love a Cajun); “L’Amour (Love); “La Belle Vie” (A Beautiful Life) and “Un Vœu” (A wish).

Bernard also makes a wood toy box in the shape of an Alpine Cottage and decorates it with wood burned designs painted with acrylic paint.

During his working career, Bernard was a teacher and principal in elementary schools. He also taught industrial arts on the secondary level and supervised USL student teachers. In 1964 he began teaching audio visual classes and in 1966 was named director of USL’s Audio-Visual Center. In 1968 he was named director of the State Film Library. During World War II he served as a member of the Counter Intelligence Corps in France and Germany.

With three degrees to his credit and additional study beyond these degree programs, he, nevertheless, went back to the university to take a class in calligraphy at USL’s Gumbo U so that he could use calligraphy for his poems and name plaques.

While his many creations are self satisfying, he and his wife, Nelda, are proudest of their four children: Linda Ann, Mrs. Carl Cucullo, New Orleans, a nurse; Keith, Milwaukee, Wis., a radiologist, and the twins, Neil and Charles III, dentists here in Lafayette.