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A hockey lover's hat trick

All sports fans, artists, and collectors, take note! Like a great strategy on the hockey ice, a Kings County resident has developed a play combining these three passions into a way of life.

Don Burry of Port Williams loves hockey. And he loves art - and collecting things. His personal triple play began developing as a child. Growing up in Toronto, his grandfather's company had season tickets for seats behind the Toronto Maple Leafs bench. Every Christmas and birthday, Don would receive the ultimate gift of a pair of tickets.

"I started collecting autographs," says Don. "I would lean over the bench - it was easier then to access the players."

Don also began collecting NHL hockey cards. "Everybody has a story about how they saved their cards in a shoe box, came home from college, and found their mother had thrown them out. Luckily, mine didn't!" Today, his extensive collection dates back to the 1951-52 hockey season.

While earning a physical education degree, he took a break from collecting. But his passion was quickly revived after moving to Edmonton to do a PhD. "This was during the heyday of the Edmonton Oilers," says Don. "It was easier to bump into the players. They were a part of the community."

Wanting more than a collection of autographs on paper, Don devised a unique and artistic way of gathering signatures. He would paint action portraits of the players, then have his subjects autograph the canvases.

As word of his talent spread, Don began earning commissions from NHL players to do portraits. On commission, he has painted such hockey greats as Pat LaFontaine, Jason Arnott, Ryan Smith, Curtis Joseph (Cujo), and Don Cherry.

"I remember when I painted Pat LaFontaine's portrait. Because of his schedule, I had to do it in one day. I don't normally work at that pace."

Aside from hockey cards and autographs, the married father of two simply likes to collect. In his "hockey room" is found a hockey lover's dream - signed NHL hockey shirts, mounted team pucks and bottle top collections, sticks, photos - the list is long!

In pursuing his love of art, Don now studies at Halifax's NSCAD University on the road to a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree.

"I want to expand the art in me. It will help me with technique and color in

both my drawing and my painting. And it may help me be taken more seriously as an artist."

Don's sports-themed paintings are not limited to hockey. Curling, golf, and swimming have made it into his collection. For the 1996 Olympic silver-medal Canadian women's synchronized swim team, his painting became a fundraiser. The team turned the artwork into a print and sold limited editions.

Aside from his private collection, Don does commission work. He has painted portraits of families, sports players, and even animals - he has illustrated a Nova Scotia book "Horses I have known".

As to the direction Don will take with his art after completing his degree, he says, "Who knows what the future will bring? Maybe one day I'll have a showing at the Hockey Hall of Fame!" That is one goal he would be proud to score.

Story and photo by Marlene Huntley



Don Burry stands in front of a selection of his autographed NHL paintings.



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