



CROWN POINT
STAR

Art Adventure by Sam Dalkilic-Miestowski

Crown Point ceramic artist — James Hanlon

I am constantly amazed and surprised by how many talented visual artists live in northwest Indiana.

Crown Point resident James Hanlon is one of them. Hanlon has been working in ceramics for nearly 30 years.

Recently, I asked him how he became interested in pottery.

Hanlon said it doesn't hurt to come from a creative family — his father was a musician and played the bass fiddle during the Big Band era.

After Dad and Mom got married and began their family (which would blossom to eight children) Dad decided the trades would be a more lucrative way to provide for his family.

Though his father was an electrician by trade, music was always near and dear to the entire Hanlon household. James Hanlon, the second youngest, said all of his siblings are musical and artistic — three of his brothers play instruments and are artistically inclined; his four sisters are also musical and creative. Though his early childhood started in Cedar Lake, Hanlon's folks would eventually move to Griffith where Hanlon said he would get his first taste of "mud."

Hanlon explained his first introduction to the "potter's wheel" was in his junior year at Griffith high school. His high school instructor was Bob Witt. In the northwest Indiana area, Witt was known as the "Golden Standard."

"Witt was a 'potter's potter,'" Hanlon said. Witt exhibited in the local art show circuits and



always shared his techniques with students and was very encouraging. By his senior year, James had his own "potter's wheel" and was assisting Witt by making small vessels in preparation for Witt's art shows, exhibitions, and openings. Hanlon spent nearly ten years apprenticing with Bob Witt and his wife learning about the wheel and the "throwing" process at the "Good Earth



All photos provided to the Star by Tom Hanlon
James Hanlon has created pottery and ceramics since his school days. On this and the next page are several examples of his outstanding creations.

Pottery" in Portage. During this time, Hanlon was taking classes at "Lill Street Studio" in Chicago by well-known instructor Les Ornstein, while simultaneously working with Robert Rosenbaum an equally well-known Chicago potter.

"Working with other potters has been a great experience, while making their line of wares, they would point out to me what they were looking for as far as form and function goes. Sometimes they would point out a tiny detail they had created which they learned from many years of practicing and practicing with years of repetition," Hanlon said. "They would help me point out the little things which could help me in my own creations.

"I think this is what it was all about for me. I very much enjoy the true shape and form of a vessel. It sounds so very simple and yet it can be extremely difficult to achieve, because an ideal shape and form is only perceived in your own mind at that moment in time while it is spinning round and round on the wheel.

"The idea of creating something out of a piece of 'mud' or clay is truly amazing to me and continues to inspire me even after 30 years. For instance, I've noticed that no two pieces of clay can affect the shape of the form the same way.

"I've learned to adjust my approach to suite the whims of that particular piece of clay, which comes from almost 30 years of experience.

"My favorite type of clay is the kind that is allowed to be age dampened and then sealed in a bag," he said.

"The porcelain I am currently "throwing" has been aging for three years.

"The firing methods I've been using are Raku,



Sager, Pit, Slip Resist and Horse Hair firing."

He said each firing method has its own unique effect on the clay.

"Personally for me, each batch of glaze and each firing process is a new experiment. I really don't get too caught up with exactness while formulating my glazes. I find myself adding a lit-



tle pinch of this or a pinch of that to the base glaze recipe just to see what happens.

"Sometimes it is the unknown which yields the best results. And as the firing goes, I have the same attitude and formula."

Ceramic artist continued, page 3

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Office location
112 W. Clark Street
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ADVERTISING DEADLINES
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Classified Friday 12:00 p.m.
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INDEX
LOCAL2
OBITUARIES12
CLASSIFIEDS13
SPORTS27

CROWN POINT STAR
An Independent Newspaper

Issue No. 50
Published weekly at 112 W. Clark Street, Crown Point, IN.

Entered as periodicals.
Postage paid at Crown Point, IN 46307 (USPS 302-060) under act of Congress of March 9, 1879.

Postmaster: send address changes to P.O. Box 419, Crown Point, IN 46308-0419.

See terms and conditions relating to advertising orders, page 9.

Ceramic artist continued from page 2

"I'll take a look at the piece while they are firing to see if the glazes have melted. Then, I go with my 'gut' feeling and make a decision on my instinct.

This is all part of the one-of-a-kind personal touch each



individual piece receives.

"Each time I approach the potter's wheel, it is always a challenge to push the limits of that particular piece of clay. I try to find that imaginary line while maintaining my balance of form which is most like the main reason why many of my pieces are as thin as they are."

"Hanlon further states, "These days it seems that most production pieces are stamped out, molded and mass produced.

"Most of the items out in the American retail stores aren't even produced in our own country. So it is very chal-



Photos provided to the Star by Tom Hanlon

The ceramic vase, above, features artist James Hanlon's daughter. In addition to vases and ewers, Hanlon creates lamps and other pottery pieces.

lenging to explain why the vessels I make may look similar to the imported pieces but really aren't the same or priced the same."

"All in all, working at the potter's wheel allows me to create vessels in the ancient tradition — which I find very fulfilling.

"Each piece is a one-of-a-kind, hand crafted and is just as unique as the hands that actually created and formed it. The process is very time consuming.

"And there are just as many steps from start to finish. Yet once the piece is fired, it will last for many generations and perhaps many thousands of years."

Currently James Hanlon

has created a series of affordable, miniature, collectible, one-of-a-kind mini-vessels. They are exquisitely made objects expertly made. These first time miniatures range in price from \$20-\$40 and are a perfect gift for friends, family and employees.

They can fit in a nook, a book case, a buffet, table top or anywhere else that would benefit from a boost from art pieces.

The gallery has a select few for the holidays, Contact Hanlon directly at jdhan@att.net.

Please mention this article when you inquire about his latest series. Happy shopping.

Sam Dalkilic-Miestowski owns and operates The Steeple Gallery, Ltd. in St. John. E-mail comments to Sam@sbc-global.net.



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