

Former Teacher Now a Third-Generation Screen Printer

By ALEX HANSON

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WINDSOR — When Steve Giroux and his wife, Roberta, moved to the Upper Valley to teach, he left behind a family legacy. Giroux's father and grandfather were sign painters in Burlington and

Giroux followed in their footsteps, at first.

They printed promotional materials for businesses, including Ben & Jerry's, and Giroux's father made a Burlington landmark — the sign for the Emile

Dupont Roofing Co., on Battery Street.

After a decade as a teacher, first at Newport's Towle Elementary School and for the last seven years at Ottauquechee School, Giroux, 52, is returning to the occupation of his youth, with a twist.

Third Generation Design, his sign and screen-printing shop, is on the bottom floor of the former Windsor firehouse.



Steve Giroux, owner of Third Generation Design in Windsor.

VALLEY NEWS — DENISE FARWELL

But Giroux is also making art. He had his first show last month at Windsor Gallery and a screen printed image of Mount Asuncney was accepted as one of 40 works in Vermont as part of the traveling exhibit of the Palette Project,

which distributed thousands of artists' palettes around the state.

Giroux has a new day job, at CATV in White River Junction, but spends early mornings and early evenings in his Windsor studio.

"Teaching is a hard job," he said. "It really is and it takes all your creative energy."

Giroux sat down with the *Valley News* recently to talk about his change of careers. An edited transcript of that conversation follows:

Valley News: What made you decide to return to screen printing?

Steve Giroux: I needed a change. I felt that I had spent enough time as a teacher. I left with good marks and I just felt that it was time to go back and do something else. Although teaching is creative, I didn't get to satisfy that creative part of my head and I didn't realize that I missed the sign screen-printing business as much as I had, particularly being self-employed. You know you're self-employed for 15 years or so and you start working for somebody else it's just not the same thing. You don't get to call your own shots. But mostly I think that I needed a change and the change was good. I'm glad I did it.

VN: Was it difficult changing careers?

SG: It's never difficult as long as you have the support of your wife. She was very supportive and she knew I needed

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to. Not that I was really burning out. I felt that I needed to get out of teaching before that happened, and I always told myself I would. It was the right time. The opportunity came up in Windsor with the firehouse space for rent, so I actually started renting that space last February, while I was still teaching, and started working, selling stuff on the side and on weekends.

VN: When you say "selling stuff" do you mean commercial type work

...

SG: Commercial type work.

VN: ... rather than work or art that's more of a personal statement that you were then trying to sell?

SG: I really couldn't do the art stuff until I was able to subsidize myself. In other words, get the space, pay for the space and the signs were an opportunity, because I'd grown up in the sign business, to make the money I needed to help subsidize the screen printing part of what I wanted to do. Although I do like making signs, I mean I grew up with that. I saw it as an opportunity to change careers, do something that I knew something about and make some money, provide myself with a living. The screen printing stuff came after that, but it was always in the back of my head as something I wanted to do.

VN: When you were teaching did you give up the screen printing entirely?

SG: Yes. I didn't have anything to do with signs for probably the first six or seven years when I was teaching. ... I got a couple little jobs on the side here and there, that I could handle in my garage. I still had my paintbrushes. I was trained with a brush and not a computer, so I was able to just ... like my father said, "As long as you have your kit" we used to call it, "your paint kit and your brushes, you can go out and make a living." So fortunately I had the knowledge and the expertise and the training from my background with my family that I could do that.

VN: When you say you weren't doing many signs, were you doing any screen printing at the time?

"I always had it in my head that eventually I wanted to get into more of the fine art screen printing."

Steve Giroux

body wanted 100 hockey pucks printed we could print 'em. If Ben & Jerry's wanted 10,000 bumper stickers we would print them. If Green Mountain Coffee Roasters wanted a prototype coffee bag we would do a prototype coffee bag for them. Those are the kinds of jobs we'd do.

VN: So you were working for some big companies?

SG: Yeah. ... It was commercial screen printing. But I always had it in my head that eventually I wanted to get into more of the fine art screen printing, take what I knew about photography and merge it.

VN: What form has that taken with the fine art work?

SG: Taking photographic images and converting them to screen prints, interpreting them in a different way. Basically taking what my dad did for a living and just taking it to a different level, using the knowledge I had that I acquired from him and just using it for something that's more artistic. I was involved with the Palette Project, for Vermont. I took an image of Mount Ascutney taken from across the river in Cornish and screen printed it on one of the wooden palettes, and that was just accepted as part of the traveling show, 40 palettes. I was very honored to be accepted. You get to go to Montpelier with 40 other artists at a reception that's being held in April.

VN: At the moment, how much of your work is art and how much of it is commerce?

SG: I'd say, well, when I'm busy it's commerce. I have to make the money. It's part of my survival right now. In the wintertime it can be easier because traditionally the sign business is slower.

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VN: When you say you weren't doing many signs, were you doing any screen printing at the time? And how are the sign painting and screen printing related?

SG: Good question. My father started out in the sign business because of his father ... and he saw the opportunity back in the '50s to get into screen printing, which is sort of mass producing an image. You know, somebody comes to you for 20 parking signs, you don't want to hand paint them, you screen print them.

So he eventually got out of the sign business and was just doing screen printing stuff. I grew up with a little bit of both but mostly the screen printing part of it. But my father did sign work. ... He went from signs to screen printing and then went back to signs again.

VN: So you do some screen printing of signs and then some painting.

SG: Yeah, because I was trained with a brush and some screen printing signs. Although a lot of what we did in Burlington was decals, bumper stickers, point-of-purchase stuff, commercial stuff. I didn't do any textiles, no T-shirts. If some-

it's commerce. I have to make the money. It's part of my survival right now. In the wintertime it can be easier because traditionally the sign business is slower.

I'm working on a second palette right now for (Woodstock's) Pentangle (Council on the Arts). That was the organization I got the palette from originally and they really didn't want to let the palette go but I had to send it to the state of Vermont. So they would like a duplicate of that for their show. ...

I've got about 17 or 18 prints I've done in the last two or three months. Those are on my shop wall. I think that as time permits that's what I'll do. I have a lot of ideas, but just have to take the time to do it.

VN: Was the Windsor Gallery show your first show?

SG: That was my first show, the first time I ever tried to do anything like that. It was fun. About 60 or 70 people showed up and I got to be a big-time artist, you know. You grow up in the sign and screen printing business it's more commerce, like you said. You don't think of it as an art form. But I guess art is anything that is done well, in the words of Robert Henri, who was an American painter.