

Worker by day, artist by night

Artemio Jimenez creates in colored light

Jessie Faulkner/Tri-City Weekly
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Artemio Jimenez overcame his fear of public speaking to win a \$25,000 Economic Fuel prize that has, like its name, fueled the start of his stained glass business, a small, tidily organized shop tucked away in a warehouse-like structure on the west end of Arcata's Tenth Street.

The walls are hung with carefully pieced and cut glass pieces coming together to show pictures of mountains, egrets, geometric designs, underwater scenes -- complete with fish -- and much more. Many are from homes, awaiting or displaying painstaking repairs. Others are colorful light-filled additions looking for the perfect home.

The endeavor has not yet become the Arcata man's sole pursuit -- a day job keeps him and his 13-year-old daughter afloat -- but it's likely that situation will change. Particularly, if a church-affiliated plan reaches divine status for Jimenez Stained Glass.

That effort, to reach out to churches on the North Coast and elsewhere, both for creating new stained glass windows and repairing damaged ones, already got a significant start with crafting a nearly 15-foot by 7-foot stained glass window in 2009 for the Arcata Lutheran Church near Humboldt State University.

Jimenez consulted closely with the church leadership to understand what was desired, drew a design, scanned it into the computer and came up with a final pattern. That suggested pattern was the focus of a formal presentation to the church members with in-depth explanation of the symbols included, colors used and the overall idea of the design.

Jimenez -- who was competing against his former boss for the job -- sufficiently impressed the potential client to be awarded the project, the largest Jimenez Stained Glass has taken on to date.

The roughly 84-square-foot window, a series of panels, took a total of 200 hours to complete, all the work done by hand.

Jimenez has a preference for Uroboros Glass, a specialized glass of varied colors, created by hand, with a resulting luminescence that adds unexpected slashes of mixed colors.

"It's hand-rolled," he said, "so everything isn't exactly the same. Each one is its own."

The glass takes on the varied colors by the addition of oxygen in the crafting process, the business owner said.

One of the most beautiful advertisements of the small business is the sign above the studio door - - simply stating "Jimenez Studio." It's a piece the owner did for himself, investing countless hours and more than a little determination to make an objet d'art.

Jimenez not only brings a design element to the small enterprise -- skills refined during the study of art and business at HSU -- but also several years spent working at Hogan Studios in Crescent City beginning in 1995. Jimenez' tale is one of those where happenstance leads to a calling.

A friend of the owner's son, Jimenez was invited to start working at the company.

"They taught me pretty much everything," he recalled.

He left to go to school and returned a year later, eventually working into the general manager position before leaving to start his own enterprise -- made possible with the economic fuel grant.

The area's seismic activity helped the business within months of its December 2009 opening. A month later a 6.3-magnitude earthquake cut loose not far from Eureka and at least a few of the colorful windows made their way to his studio for repairs. It's precise work, meshing new glass into an existing design.

But, Jimenez' creativity doesn't end there. An iron frame of a large bird set on one of the studio's benches. Jimenez is picking out the colored glass and cutting the shapes to bring the sculpture to life.

"I do all the glasswork," he said. "Everything is still done by hand."

Over years of working in the medium, he's refined the critical element of soldering, creating the thick or thin lines of metal that hold a piece together. Working with a mix of 50 percent tin and 50 percent lead, the metal flows a little better, he said. Part of the skill is to know how to make it show and add to the quilt-like design.

That beauty, if things go as planned, will be found primarily in churches both locally and elsewhere.

"Our big focus is the church," the owner said.

To see a sample of the glassworkers' skills, call 633-6266.