

**Bob Bennett Jr. in his Placerville Gallery with one of his father's last bronze works, *Imagine*, priced at \$75,000.**

Bennett's technology pursuits were a departure from the family legacy. His father, Bob Bennett, Sr., and his father's twin brother, Tom, are a world-renowned artistic team.

it doesn't feel like it. "It's different when you work for yourself," he says. "It's more rewarding." His flexible schedule allows him to catch up on business

details late at night and during any hour of the day he chooses.

The 2,000-square-foot showroom is long and narrow, with paintings and sculptures thoughtfully displayed down the corridor. The building is a work of art in itself, with walls alternating in red brick and simple white stucco panels that stretch up to meet the high ceilings. Friends and acquaintances drop by throughout the day to visit the proprietors. The Bennett family dog, a yellow lab named Rudy, frequently naps behind the counter.

The artists featured in the gallery are mostly family and friends of family. On prominent display are pieces by Bennett's late father and uncle, who continues to create inspiring new works. Other artists showcased at the gallery include Bennett's sister, Ashley Bennett-Stoddard. Her impressionistic paintings hang in galleries across the country. Ashley's friend, Pamela Findleton, captures everyday life with her colorful paintings portraying scenes ranging from waterfronts to animals. Tom Bennett's daughter Terrie Bennett of Taos, N.M., follows her father's passion by creating her own unique bronze sculptures. Her figures favor marine wildlife and images of the Southwest.

Handblown glass artists and Auburn residents Rick and Janet Nicholson, and ceramicist and Bay Area resident Kirk McCracken also show at the gallery. The Nicholsons' colorful work appears internationally in galleries and private corporate offices.

McCracken has developed his own approach to the Asian art of raku. He selects special clay for each design and creates his own glazes that are oxidized with natural materials such as leaves, straw and pine needles.

This process creates vivid and intense colors that are signature features of his designs.

Many of the regular gallery sales come from the wedding sculptures designed by M.K. Shannon. Plated in pewter, the elegant cake toppers are silver or gold and provide a unique keepsake for discriminating brides. The shop boasts steady Internet sales for the pieces, which range in price from \$80 to \$425.

The other hot sellers for the gallery are the hand-sculpted recognition awards, which are similar to the statues handed out at the Oscars. A picture of Oprah Winfrey receiving an exclusive Bennett Gallery creation hangs behind the counter. Other famous recipients of the unique awards include former President George Bush, Sammy Davis Jr., Bob Hope and Earvin (Magic) Johnson.

The seven-day-per-week gallery schedule forced the Bennetts to divide their home responsibilities. The

ex-corporate exec admits he is very organized and has implemented a tight family schedule. He routinely picks up his children from school and has time to attend their activities.

"He runs a tight ship, but the kids have adjusted well," laughs Alice, who

says she relishes the family's nightly dinners, "Sometimes I want to just pinch myself. I can't believe we all get to sit down together every night; it's wonderful. There was a time just a few years ago when I would never have seen him during daylight."

As for the future, Bob thinks about opening additional galleries but says, "We want to have a couple of years under our belt here before we consider expanding." He is also looking forward to the spring 2005 publication of a coffee-table book commemorating Bennett Sr.'s work.

Bennett thinks for a while when asked what he misses about his former life. He finally replies: "Getting a steady paycheck." He quickly adds, "But there's no comparison. This business is a good fit for my family and me. I can't imagine going back to work." ➔

### Bob Bennett's Advice to Business Owners

**"Follow your heart and intuition, both in your initial decision to pursue a small business and in the many decisions you make actually managing it. Nine times out of 10, your intuition points you in the right direction."**

**"Just because you are running a small business doesn't mean it can't benefit from some of the same principles used in Corporate America – careful planning, strong organization and attention to detail."**

**"Be flexible. Things seldom go as planned. Be persistent, but not hardheaded, and always have contingency plans in place."**