



INSIDER

Dan Monk

Stained glass makers nervous but keep the faith

You know you're in a rough economy when you can't get a rosy outlook from a guy who sells rose-colored glass.

"I'm nervous about the next project," said Bob Kessler, whose Loveland-based company, Kessler Studios Inc., has built a national reputation for artistry in stained-glass windows.

Kessler and his wife, Cindy, are finishing up the largest project in their firm's 28-year history, a two-story wall of windows that will decorate the 19th-floor chapel of a 53-story retirement home on Chicago's Gold Coast.

After that job, the pair will concentrate on a new church for the Salvation Army in Ashland,

Ohio. After that, Kessler isn't sure.

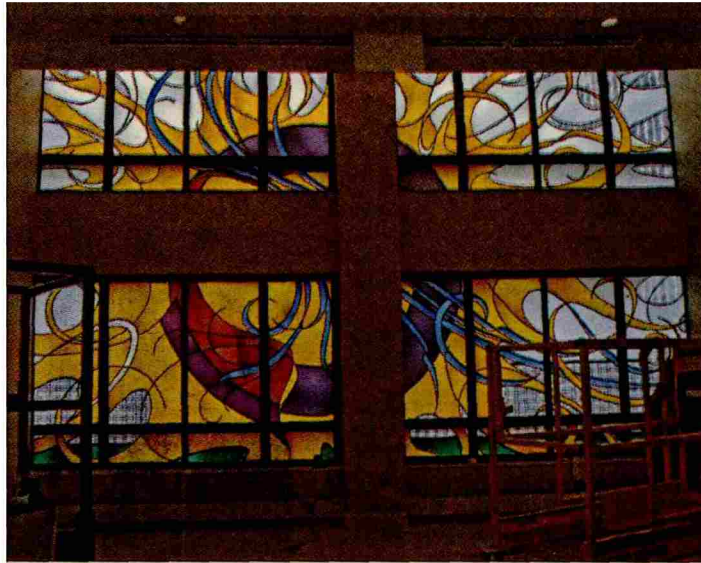
'We have a unique style. That is maybe why we've had a steady flow.'

Cindy Kessler
Kessler Studios Inc.

"Certainly we have a unique style. That is maybe why we've had a steady flow."

The Chicago project is part of The Clare at Water Tower, a condo high-rise being built by the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago.

"It's scary to see the economy not doing well, but we've been very blessed with a steady flow of work," said Cindy Kessler, who takes months to design and manufacture her windows, made of hand-blown German glass.



COURTESY OF KESSLER STUDIOS INC.

A new two-story wall of windows at a retirement home in Chicago is an abstract depiction of part of the story of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Clare.

The religious order commissioned a 12-panel window depicting the relationship between St. Francis of Assisi and St. Clare, a 13th century follower who left her aristocratic family for a life of poverty. The window is an abstract depiction of an event in which Clare, Francis and their followers came together for a meal in the forest near Assisi.

"The villagers perceived that the forest was on fire," Cindy Kessler said. "It was the tremendous spiritual energy of these two spiritual figures."

ABILITY TO TELL A STORY

Kessler's work gets rave reviews from Jeanette Lindish, vice president for mission integration and pastoral care for the

Chicago Franciscans.

"We were just so impressed with her ability to interpret our story ... and still have it open enough that others could walk in and connect their own story to that window," Lindish said.

Cindy Kessler has so far only seen pictures of the window her husband, Bob, installed this month. But she relishes the prospect of seeing the finished product when the chapel is dedicated.

"To create a building takes many different trades, from plumbers to electricians, and everyone is equally as important ... but I'm the one that gets the hugs. Windows just make a place come alive," she said.

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