

## Part-time art interest turns into full-time job

PAUL POWELL

The Victoria Advocate

MOULTON — When George Kalisek began to dabble in holiday yard art 15 years ago he didn't think it would ever amount to much.

Today, hundreds of the Moulton man's Christmas designs dot yards and businesses throughout South Texas. He said he hardly has enough hours in the day to fill the mountain of orders which continue to pour in each year.

Raised on a farm in the rolling hills on the outskirts of town, Kalisek always enjoyed doodling. He doodled through high school, in his spare time at home and whenever he could during his first full-time job at a local boot factory.

Kalisek's career in commercial art began as a part-time sign painter. He shaped boot leather by day, and painted and erected business signs by night.

When the boot making played out in the early 1980's, Kalisek faced a dilemma: sharpen the family farm implements, get a job in the city or chance making a living with art.

He chose art.

"I was living at home and decided that if things didn't work out I could always do something different," he said.

Sandwiched between sign orders and other commercial projects, Kalisek filled occasional special requests for holiday yard art. "I didn't pursue it and never thought much about it. But the more I did, the more orders I

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George Kalisek,  
commercial artist

got."

Kalisek now spends two-thirds of his time on yard art, with the balance devoted to business signs.

He said he'll sell about 65 percent of the more than 3,000 pieces of yard art that he'll produce this year through his store in Moulton — Kalisek's Art and Sign Shop. There are four other dealers of his wares in Richmond, Hondo, Brenham and Yoakum.

"I spend the first half of each year producing inventory for my store. And from the summer through the first of November filling orders for the other stores I supply," he said.

But Kalisek always reserves November for special projects. This year he's doing multiple piece designs, one with a Mexican theme and the other an Eskimo.

The Mexican theme will include cactus with lights and Santa arriving on a burro with toys on his back and a sombrero on his head. The Eskimo scene will include a decorated and lighted igloo with children dragging a Christmas tree through the

snow.

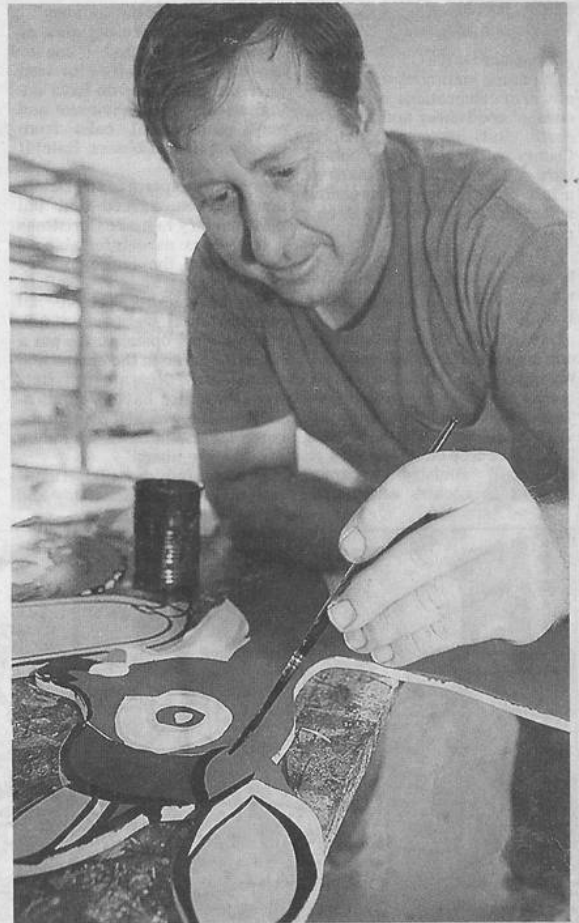
Of course, Kalisek says the standard Christmas yard art includes angels, trees, manger scenes, chipmunks, snowmen, bells, carolers, Santas and sleighs, reindeer and special pieces such as Santas packing toys on planes, trains, tractors, cars, motorcycles and horses.

He also produces one or two motorized and lighted pieces of yard art each year. Currently, he's making a Ferris wheel and carousel and soon he intends to add a train that'll belch smoke, whistle and move up and down a short track.

Kalisek says most of his special order pieces go for \$70 to \$80 a piece, while most stand alone signs sell anywhere from \$25 to \$175 each depending on their complexity.

He employs two full-time people and four contract helpers who cut out and prime his sign stock after he traces out a design on it.

Kalisek says his typical work day is from 8 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and half a day on Saturday.



James Wilcox/The Victoria Advocate

George Kalisek employs two full-time people and four contract helpers at his shop in Moulton. He said his typical work day is from 8 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and half a day on Saturday.

Sunday, November 21, 1993



George Kalisek is pictured in his Moulton shop surrounded by some of the lawn art he has designed for Christmas.

## A brief sketch of a lawn artist

Santa Claus wears cowboy boots. We all know that in Texas, and anybody who doesn't needs only to take a good look while driving past some of the Santas that George Kalisek turns out at his shop in Moulton.

Kalisek has turned lawn art into a thriving business.

He has George's Art and Sign Shop at the edge of Moulton at South Lancaster and Longhorn, adjacent to the Knights of Columbus Hall, where he displays a wide variety in lawn art.

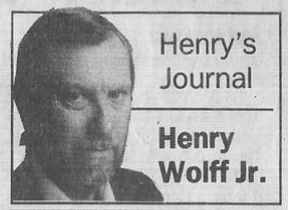
Kalisek has about 500 designs in three sizes, and at his home shop employs two people full-time and two part-time, in addition to getting some help from his sister,

Joyce Luksovsky.

All his work is custom art on weather-resistant signboard, and he has designs for all the holidays and just about anything a person would want in their yards.

I learned of Kalisek through the custom trophy plaques that he makes for many of the chili and barbecue cook-offs around the area, but had no idea about the lawn art until I happened to visit his shop recently.

He did 139 trophies for the Lone Star Classic Chevy Club show in Victoria this past summer and was working on trophies last week for the Victoria and Surrounding Areas's Chili Appreciation Society International cook-off on Nov. 27 at



Coletto Inn.

All his work is of original design, done in free hand, and he says it all got started when he was about 14 years old, although for some years it was just something he did on the side in addition to farming.

"I farmed for about 25 years after my dad, Willie, passed away in 1969," Kalisek says.

He graduated from Moulton High School in 1973.

Kalisek also worked for a boat shop in Moulton and did sign painting on the side until he had to quit that to take care of all his painting jobs.

About two years ago, he quit the farming.

Last year, Kalisek did about 2,500 pieces of lawn art.

Right now, his showroom is filled with Christmas orders waiting to be picked up, including everything from single Santas to huge displays such as a 17-piece Nativity scene.

Kalisek had no formal training in woodworking or art, but always had a natural talent for art.

"I was sketching as far back as I can remember," he says, "but really got serious about it when I was 14."

That was when he got his first payment of \$5 for a sign he painted for Norman Novosad, formerly of Moulton, now of Edna.

"He had me paint a sign for one of his barbecue places," Kalisek recalls. "Just lettering on a soft drink sign."

Novosad had heard that Kalisek could draw good and the \$5 impressed Kalisek that he could make money at it.

Others soon started calling on him to do signs.

Same way with the trophies and the lawn art.

A neighbor, Julius Jasek, had Kalisek make a Texas plaque as an auction item for the Praha Feast in 1979 and someone from the Czhlispiel in Flatonina saw it.

"I've been doing their trophies ever since," he says, "and the winners passed the word around."

He started doing lawn art about 10 years ago when someone asked him to do a few pieces to decorate a yard at Christmas.

"Others saw it and started calling," he says, "and I realized there might be a market and started making some pieces on speculation."

The first year he did about 50 pieces.

In addition to his show in Moulton, his work is sold in Brenham, East Bernard, Lake Jackson, Bryan and Yoakum.

His art stands out because he does his own designs and has the talent to make the figures seem almost as if they are real, and also he uses only long-lasting signboards and paints.

"These will last a lifetime if you take care of them," he says.

Kalisek has built his business on talent and craftsmanship.

"And," he says, "lots of practice."