

VERY POPULAR with Wrenovations' customers are stained glass pieces depicting loons. (Edward French photo)

Wrenovations highlights joy in stained glass

by Susan Esposito

It's definitely not on the main drag, but there is a special shop in the woods of Robbinston that is well worth finding. Filled with unique hand-designed stained glass items, Wrenovations is a destination for anyone who enjoys browsing and treasures quality and fine workmanship.

If you drive along the Robbinston Ridge Road, about one mile from Mill Cove turnoff you should spot signs for Steam Mill Road and Wrenovations. Follow the dirt road to the Wrens' property, stroll over to their shop, and walk through the door of Wrenovations Stained Glass Creations. There you will see on the walls and windows a colorful selection of mirrors, jewelry, panels, and suncatchers created from the imagination and skills of Mark and Arlene Wren. Tiffany and mission-style lamps, flower blossom candleholders and nightlights sit on tables and windowsills, and wind chimes made from thinly sliced geodes hang from the ceiling.

The jewelry, all made by Arlene, includes earrings and pins depicting loons, sailboats, fish, mushrooms and a cross-eyed cat. Mark is responsible for the larger and more expensive pieces, although prices are very reasonable.

"The number of colors you see dictates price. Orange, red and yellow cost more, because of the chemicals used to make them," notes Mark. "And, a few [items] only take an hour, but some take days to make."

Mark points out that he has gone through a bird phase, flower phase, Celtic phase, Victorian phase and abstract phase, and examples of all of those decorative styles can be seen among the original designs featured in the gift shop. "I'm going to do folk art style, too," notes Mark, nodding at a window hanging that was made to look like a "Morning Star" quilt.

They are popular with customers, so loons are a predominant motif among the Wrens' creations. Each bird is hand-painted by Arlene because, although they have been looking for 15 years, the couple has not found the proper color of glass.

"Everywhere we travel, we pick up items," says Mark, pointing to nautilus shells from Key West which are featured in several pieces. "Anything that can be

incorporated into a design."

The Wrens moved to Maine in 1978 from upstate New York. "It's rural, like here, so this felt like home," explains Mark, who is a carpenter, millwright and welder. After living in Lubec and Cutler, the couple purchased the old Johnson Farm off the Ridge Road in Robbinston, where they designed and built themselves a new house. Designing and creating stained glass items, however, was a gradual learning experience for Mark and Arlene, who were usually busy with full-time jobs.

"We gave everything away as gifts," Mark recalls of their early creations. "Then, in the early '90s, we actually had art shows in our house, usually for Mother's Day and Christmas, to sell my work." Mark and Arlene eventually constructed the shop, behind their home, in which to display and sell their stained glass wares.

"I thrive on feedback," stresses Mark, gesturing toward several mirrors which had been turned into mirror-windows, thanks to someone's suggestion. "I design around what people want."

Mark explains that, after the Wrens have created a design, a pattern is prepared and the design is transferred to the glass. Each piece of glass is cut, the edges are ground and then wrapped with copper foil. Next, the pieces are fitted together, and the seams are soldered on both sides.

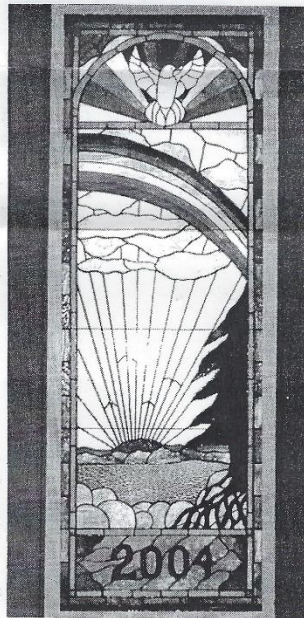
The copper foil technique is used to join the glass pieces together, because it allows the use of small pieces of stained glass, which results in greater detail in the completed artwork.

Wrenovations recently completed its largest commission, a 7'x 3' 150th anniversary window for the Union Congregational Church at Grand Lake Stream. "They were looking for something new and different," explains Mark of the church congregation. "They wanted a rainbow and a big window. Most people don't really have a concept of what they want, so I do small drawings and color them. We took off from the 2004 idea."

In addition to a colorful rainbow, the finished window depicts a sunrise on a lake surrounded by a rocky shore, as well as the 2004 date. A dove completes the scene. "The commission is actually for two windows, but I want to make sure everyone is happy with that one," says

Mark, who framed and installed the window on July 5.

Another of Wrenovations' most interesting commissions was for Frank and Helen Crohn of Perry. Mark designed a custom-built pocket window that slides



A WRENOVATIONS CREATION is this seven-foot window for a church in Grand Lake Stream.

into a wall which serves as a room divider between the kitchen and summer room. "There is a wonderful combination of cherry, dark accents and copper," recalls Mark.

Wrenovations is open year-round from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays, and on weekends by appointment. Mark is currently constructing a new house and shop, much closer to the main road, so the Wrens and Wrenovations will be easier to find in the near future. For more information, contact them at 454-2832 or e-mail them at <wrenovations@midmaine.com>.