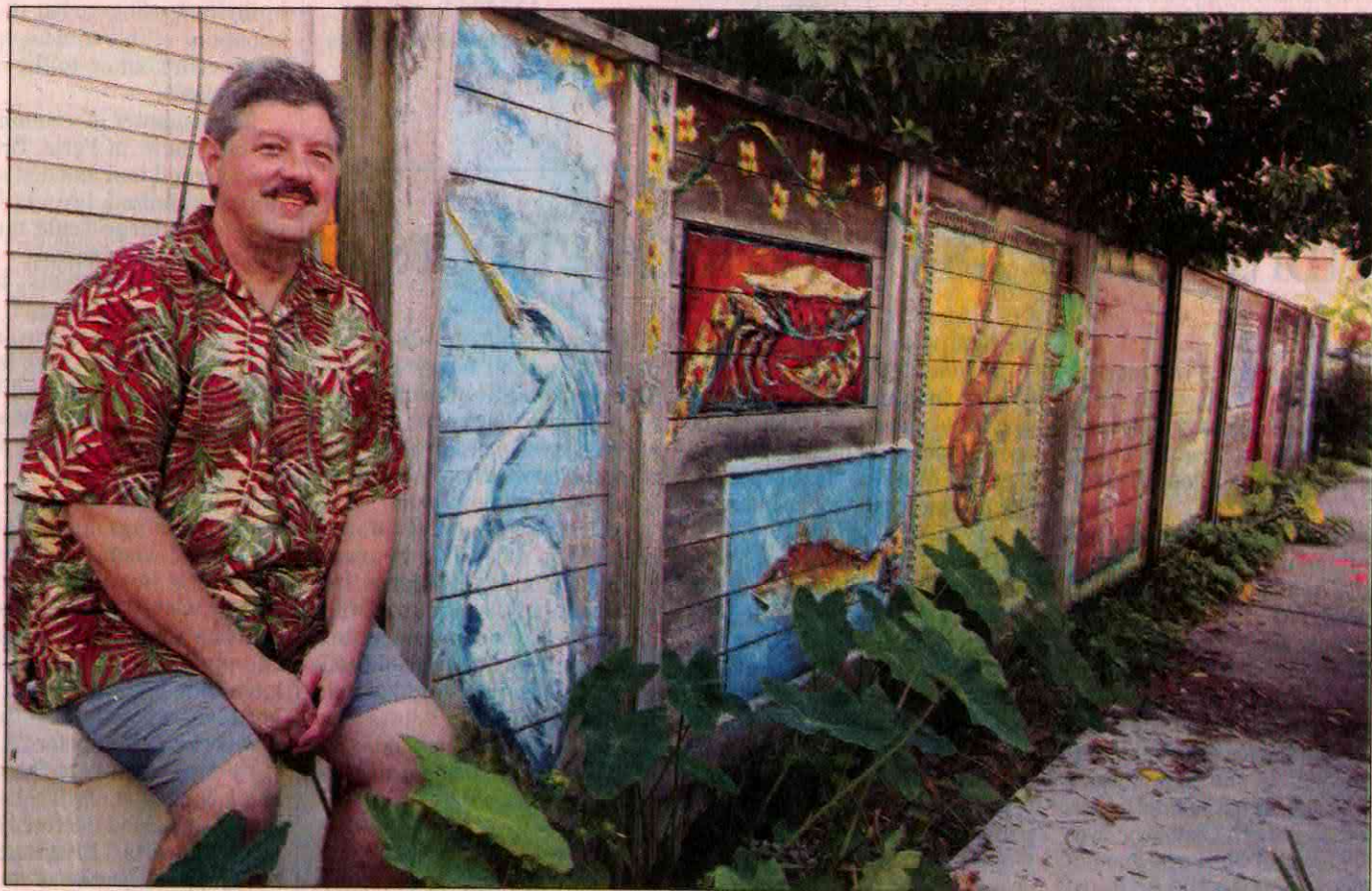


FOLLOWING A DREAM



ELIOT KAMENITZ / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE

Local artist Martin Welch, who started painting later in life after a career of repairing jewelry, shows off painting he did on the fence at his home.

Friend's death spurred career change

*Jeweler decided
to pick up
paintbrushes*

By Mary Rickard
Contributing writer

His whole life, Martin Welch had been told it was impossible to earn a living as an artist. But at 44 years old, he sold everything he owned to study painting.

"I can do it," he convinced himself. "What's to be scared of?"

Twelve years later, Welch is a well-known New Orleans artist whose signature red, gold and turquoise crab paintings are popular with Gulf Coast residents.

Welch was honored recently at the Windsor Court Hotel during its first Art Showcase Series reception.

Giant, brilliantly colored canvases encircled the hotel's stately ballrooms.

"That crab looks like it's crawling right off the canvas," said Susan Danielson, who attended the showing. "That's how the shrimp moves in the water — it's so full of energy," she said of another painting.

Welch has received multiple

prizes for his art at two international shrimp festivals and was chosen one of the 10 best artists by the New Orleans Museum of Art during its 2008 "Love in the Garden" series. Four of his works — a shrimp, an oyster, a fish and a dragonfly — were selected by set designers for HBO's "Treme" to decorate the Bernette family's kitchen.

Welch's current work is daring and assertive, but that was not always the case.

'What I wanted to do'

Though he painted at an early age, winning a fifth-grade prize, his parents discouraged his budding ambition. "They

really had no idea to send me to art or design school. They didn't know what was possible," Welch said.

Growing up in the Mississippi Delta, the family had no access to art museums, he said.

After studying chemistry at the University of Mississippi and Delta State University, he joined the U.S. Navy. When he completed his military service, he returned home to Greenville, Miss., and ran a jewelry business for 13 years.

Welch finally took a risk, following the untimely death of a friend.

See **PAINTER**, Page 2