

Moonlighting ad executive brushes up on second career

By LARRY ENGLUND

Todd Hollingsworth is conflicted, but in a good way. As a small-business owner and artist, the 43-year-old father of two has had to balance entrepreneurship and a focus on the bottom line with a passion for painting and the demands of a growing family.

For the past 10 years, he and his wife, Tina, have owned and operated T&T Designs, an ad agency with a long list of clients that range from the Highland Business Association to SciMed. In his spacious office, however, Hollingsworth doesn't display examples of his advertising work. Instead, paintings hang on the walls and from the ceiling of the room.

Surrounded by large acrylic works and smaller watercolors, the Merriam Park resident talked with relish of his work in advertising, though he seemed to get tangled up when discussing his activities as a father and artist. "It's, uh, I don't know,

a midlife struggle," he said with a hint of disappointment in his choice of words. "A lot of my friends live in a kid-centric environment where they're working hard at a day job or it's all about the kids—which is fine. But many people have forgotten how to have fun."

At the end of his work day, Hollingsworth moves into his own kid-centric world of coaching his children's sports teams, volunteering at their school and taking advantage of the family fun the Twin Cities offers. "It's all about the kids until they hit the hay," he said.

Once his responsibilities to Max, 9, and Abbie, 5, have been fulfilled, "that's when the other aspect of my life kicks in," he said. "On Fridays and Saturdays I'll catch some local music at the Hexagon or Turf Club or stay up until 3:00 in the morning painting."

As an artist, Hollingsworth finds particular inspiration in the human form. His wife Tina is a favorite subject, as are his kids and some close friends. He originally set out to



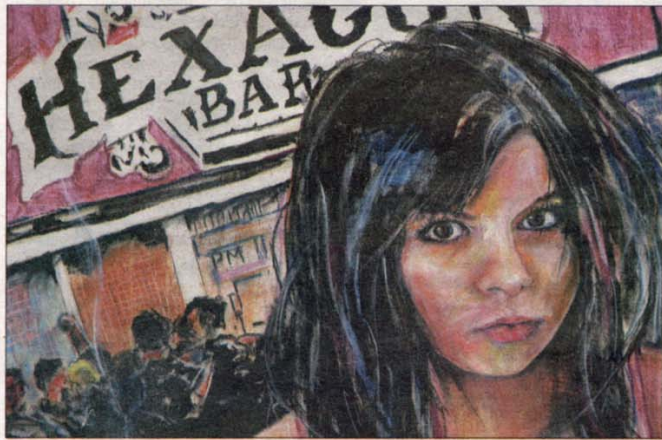
Artist Todd Hollingsworth arranges paintings in his Midway studio. PHOTOS BY BRAD STAUFFER

create paintings in the style of the classic pin-ups, but "I settled on the face rather than the pose," he said. The results are striking and sometimes provocative. The women in his paintings stare out at the viewer with

a gaze that is variously inviting, innocent, challenging and questioning.

Though Hollingsworth also works in

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A detail from Todd Hollingsworth's acrylic painting, "Emo at the Hex."

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watercolor, most of his paintings are done in acrylic and crayon on 2-foot square pieces of wood that he buys at a local lumber yard. "The wood's got a nice texture, but it's not as bumpy as canvas," he said. He uses acrylics to create texture and adds details with a special brand of crayon. Finally, he gives the pieces a light dusting of spray paint to dull their appearance. "I like the finished product to look a little dirty and overworked," he said.

Hollingsworth creates other works on large sheets of vinyl recycled from the billboards he has created for clients. One 4-by-6-foot piece, done in a monochromatic palette of blues, grays and black, depicts a woman staring straight ahead, her eyes partially hidden in the shadow of a hat. "A friend gave me a photo that she took of herself," he said, "and I used that to create this piece."

Hollingsworth has exhibited his art at several coffee shops and taverns around town as well as at his church. "When I have an exhibition, I like to hang out and watch the reaction of people as they come in and look around," he said. Apparently, those who frequent the bars like his work. "A few get stolen each time," he said.

Hollingsworth will open a month-long exhibit of his paintings with a reception on Friday, July 31, at J&S Bean Factory, 1518 Randolph Ave. He will also be showing his work in September at Palmer's Bar on Cedar Avenue in South Minneapolis, and this fall his work will be part of a group show at the Spot Art Gallery in Northeast Minneapolis.

Spot Art Gallery puts out an annual call for submissions from Twin Cities artists, and gallery owner Scotty Johnson said he really likes Hollingsworth's use of color and design. "It's a little edgier and will fit in well with the other artists in the show," Johnson said.

Like other businesses, Hollingsworth's ad agency has been affected by the current economy and his work load is down. "That has allowed me to do more of this stuff," he said, gesturing to the paintings around the room. "I'm not up until midnight every night trying to get something done for a client."

Hollingsworth still enjoys the club scene. He sees it as a way to recharge his creative batteries. "I didn't go out much when I was younger," he said. "I was focused on my career." Now he is building a new career as an artist. He hopes that in his paintings people will remember the passion they felt "when they first discovered they were alive."

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