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JOHN SHANNON

Love for art transforms to business success

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John Shannon grew up in a family of artists. His father was an inventor and draftsman. In his youth he would make Christmas cards for people or go out into the Wisconsin fields and paint landscape with watercolor. Shannon's brother Tom is an accomplished artist with sculptures all around the world.

"We grew up in a family where drawing and expressing oneself visually was part of growing up," Shannon said.

But the 74-year-old, who was born in La Crosse, never was an artist himself, just an art enthusiast.

That love for art connected Shannon and his wife, Jan Serr, an accomplished painter and graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. It continued with him as he collected art and managed his family's electrical manufacturing company, Quick Cable, for 42 years.

Quick Cable had operations in Racine and Toronto. Shannon started the Canadian operations and lived in Toronto from 1970 to 1978 developing the company. He then returned to the U.S. and took over both operations as CEO and president. Shannon grew the company into a major North American manufacturer and supplier of electronic connectors and wiring. However, the next step was to take the business international, he said.

"At my age, that was not the right thing to do," Shannon said.

He sold Quick Cable to a private equity company in April 2012 and molded his passion for art into his next business endeavor as the owner of Guardian Fine Art Services at 1635 W. Saint Paul Ave. in Milwaukee.

"He is kind of a serial entrepreneur. He's got this business and manufacturing hat, but he is all in on the arts, too. It's just phenomenal," UWM chancellor Mark Mone said.

Guardian serves a unique role in the arts community as the only arts



John Shannon (with wife, Jan Serr) ... "We see it as a business opportunity, and we see it as a time to raise the profile of Milwaukee."

► IN THE DETAILS

Title: Founder and managing director

Company: Guardian Fine Art Services and The Warehouse

Education: University of Chicago, Harvard Business School

Family: Jan Serr (wife of 49 years); legal guardian of nieces Sarah Shannon and Kate Shannon; and Tess (16-year-old Border Terrier)

Hometown: La Crosse

Resides: Milwaukee's east side

Age: 74

Hobbies: Jogging, collecting art, attending theater, music, dance and film

Book currently reading: "Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin" by Timothy Snyder

Travel destinations: Includes India, China and a future trip to South Africa

storage facility in Wisconsin.

Shannon and his wife had collected a little over 3,600 pieces of art, and they didn't know where to store it. While researching options they discovered the closest art storage facility was in Chicago.

"That was inconvenient for me, but I also thought that it isn't good for the city. It isn't good for the community," Shannon said. "We saw a need. I saw that as a personal need, and I also saw that as a civic need."

The 74,000-square-foot building includes high-security storage, a woodworking shop to create packing material and storage crates, and a museum, which is open to the public. The company not only stores art and other collectibles but also provides installation, collection management, conservation, preservation and transportation of artwork.

"The level of safety and care really

meets the same standards that we hold our own storage to," Milwaukee Art Museum spokeswoman Amanda Peterson said. Guardian services both private collectors and museums.

Guardian Fine Art Services most recently received a TSA-designation as an indirect air carrier authorized representative to more easily, efficiently and safely transport artwork. Now, Guardian employees are able to bypass TSA checkpoints when dropping off and picking up artwork from an airport.

The 12-person Guardian staff focuses on the three main aspects to secure storage – environmental controls, security and education on proper storage and handling techniques. The building has card readers and interior and exterior closed-circuit televisions, which are monitored 24 hours a day.

"It's really exciting for the

museum to have state-of-the-art technology and best practice in Wisconsin because before we would have to refer people to Illinois or other bordering states depending on where someone lived," Peterson said.

Shannon and his wife are also recognized for their philanthropy, donating specifically in areas of education, medical research and nature conservancy.

In the arts, Shannon and his wife have donated significantly to UWM. Shannon served as a chair of the Peck School of the Arts Campaign. Shannon and Serr most recently made a \$1 million gift to the Jan Serr Studio in the Kenilworth Building, which UWM has used for a variety of arts events.

"There are those outright gifts, and then there's the leadership to bring a lot of others along with them," Mone said.

Shannon's next goal is to be known nationwide for a premiere art storage facility. Already, he has been traveling with his team to different arts-based meetings and conventions to spread word of his business.

"We need to be known and respected throughout the upper Midwest. We see it as a business opportunity, and we see it as a time to raise the profile of Milwaukee," Shannon said.