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Bill and Deb Mack: The Art of Entrepreneurship

A passion for art leads to success for local power couple **BY STEVEN SCHUSSLER**

IN MINNESOTA, SCULPTOR BILL MACK IS best known as the artist that created larger-than-life bronze statues of legendary Twins ball players Kirby Puckett, Harmon Killebrew, Rod Carew and Kent Hrbek at Target Field. What many don't know is that Bill Mack is the world's preeminent relief sculptor; his works of art are in the homes and galleries of celebrities, U.S. Presidents and art lovers around the globe.

I was fascinated to learn more about Bill Mack as an artist and an entrepreneur and had a hunch he would have business perspectives to share to inspire other entrepreneurs.

Erin Taylor Editions (Bill's studio) and Griffin Gallery of Fine Art (his wife Deb's gallery) are both housed in Edina's historic Camelot castle, the site of the former Camelot Restaurant, where the couple became engaged many years ago.

On the day of our interview, I was greeted by Mack, wearing his signature red rose on his lapel. We sat down to talk, along with his wife Deb, and I learned many fascinating things about this power couple, who have been married 35 years. They both possess a special combination of artistic talent, business acumen and drive.

When asked how he got into the world of art, Mack says, "It's interesting because no one in my family was directly involved in art. I began my career in high school by creating and selling oil portraits. When I was 17, I was employed as a draftsman for a company making bronze dedication tablets. Another artist submitted a poor quality relief portrait for a memorial tablet and I knew I could do a better job. I gave it a shot and my work was accepted."

Mack spent the next 20 years working mostly as a commissioned artist. His projects ranged from creating Bicentennial medals to reliefs and full-round sculptures for corporations like General Motors and 3M. In the early 1980s, he decided to enter the competitive gallery world.

Mack debuted his gallery work in New York and in a remarkably short time, achieved worldwide acceptance with exhibitions in galleries across the globe. His work is in the collections of former

Presidents including Clinton, Ford and Reagan. Celebrities also own his work; the list includes Elton John, Sylvester Stallone and Prince Albert of Monaco, among others.

In addition to the bronze sculptures at Target Field, Mack's art can be found coast to coast. In New York, his piece entitled "Lady" is part of the permanent collection of the Statue of Liberty National Monument on Liberty Island. His sculpture of basketball great Kareem Abdul-Jabbar hangs in the entry of the NBA Hall of Fame.

Mack is modest about his entrepreneurial instincts. He owns several businesses and is an astute businessman. The Erin Taylor Gallery is a studio/showroom and sells to galleries around the world. The couple hosts an annual show in Minnesota for about half-dozen galleries, at which time they bring in their individual clients.

"Our relationship financially is the same as if we were selling in a gallery in Vegas, Hawaii or some other place except that here we sell more art because we can show a hundred pieces when a gallery can show maybe 20," says Mack of their extensive gallery space. "We can bond with the staff and the clients at the gallery better. They know that we are ethical and won't steal their clients. If I start selling my art out of here to the public, I may end up competing with the galleries and they would not like that."

For Deb, who shares a passion for art with her husband, Griffin Gallery began as a hobby and is now quite a business. The collections in the gallery feature traditional and contemporary fine art originals, limited edition prints, etchings, celebrity artifacts, sports memorabilia and more. Deb loves working with and mentoring both nationally and internationally-acclaimed artists.



« Steven Schussler with Deb and Bill Mack outside Edina's historic Camelot Castle, home to Erin Taylor Editions and Griffin Gallery of Fine Arts.

Mack is an avid collector of original artwork and Hollywood memorabilia including costumes such as the one worn by Bert Lahr as the Cowardly Lion in *The Wizard of Oz* and Clark Gable's coat from *Gone with the Wind*. He owns a collection of several Presidential letters written by Washington, Lincoln, Jefferson, Kennedy and others.

When asked about his advice for entrepreneurs, Mack says, "You have to be inspired to be an entrepreneur and you have to be committed. You have to be prepared to work no matter what you do. There is no shortcut." **and**



« Steven Schussler is chairman and CEO of Schussler Creative, Inc. Creator of Rainforest Cafe and several other restaurants, Schussler is also a consultant, branding expert and author of "It's a Jungle in There: Inspiring Lessons, Hard-won Insights and Other Acts of Entrepreneurial Daring." To learn more, visit www.schusslercreative.com.