

## ART

# Putting the pieces together is mosaic artist's specialty

BY MEGAN RAPHAEL

Special to the Record-Eagle

TRAVERSE CITY — Glass is Brian Strickland's passion.

The glass mosaic artist maintains a gallery in the lower level of his downtown home. There, the wide range of his creations both large and small are displayed — giving evidence of

the depth of that passion. Vivid colors and intricate designs appear in his candleholders, tables, window hangings and room dividers.

"I love glass and I want people to see it," he said.

Strickland "caught the bug" in high school, when he was introduced to glass mosaic in an art class. College, a stint in the army and travels through Europe

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**Brian Strickland shows a sample of his glass mosaic art in the lower level of his downtown Traverse City home.**

temporarily halted his artwork, but when he returned to Traverse City, he decided "I've got to do something with my life now" and began doing glass mosaics again.

For many years, Strickland sold his work at art fairs. But he got tired of the hauling involved in setting up and began to develop his own gallery. While he continues to hold a limited number of shows each year, the gallery is his pride and joy.

He encourages people to visit and enjoy the gallery and serene garden leading into it.

Many people first experience Strickland's work at the Candle Factory, where he has been a candlemaker for 32 years. Born and raised in Traverse City, he used to frequently go to the store to see their beautiful candles. When he was asked if he wanted to work there,

he jumped at the chance.

"I love my job and the variety in it," he said.

He works full-time and then spends three to four hours each day doing his glass work.

While he is known for his candleholders, he also does larger projects, many on commission by individuals, churches and other groups.

Strickland is an avid bicyclist and his art reflects it; he specializes in bicycle mosaics. Many of his pieces include images of brightly colored bikes. He also has an extensive collection of "bike art," including wind-up toys and drawings.

Several of the greatest bicyclists in the world own Strickland's art work, including Lance Armstrong and Greg LeMond.

Strickland's house is also a work of art. Originally the Elmwood School House, it was moved to its current

location in 1914 from the other side of town. It was converted to a church and owned by several denominations before Strickland bought it in the mid-1980s.

Since then, the house and garden have been completely renovated. Still, people who have some past connection to the house often show up on Strickland's doorstep. On one occasion, a couple stopped by who had been married in the church 50 years earlier and brought their family with them to have a photo taken on the front steps in honor of their anniversary.

Strickland continues to come up with new designs for his mosaics and has many future plans for both his art work and gallery.

"I'm inspired every day and always thinking of something new," he said.