

MARCH 2018

# Sculpting a life: Hartland artist Bryan Berenson took circuitous route to find his calling

By Chris Bennett  
Special to The Freeman

HARTLAND — If you didn't have a favorite sculptor, you do now. Bryan Berenson can be defined as a renaissance man in the truest sense of the word.

Berenson, who is based in Hartland, recently spent time in Nevada, where he carved his father's tombstone.

"It was good to have sun," Berenson said. "Carving your parents' tombstone — it's nice to give back to them. It's a gift I have, and I was happy to give back."

Berenson said his father passed on a few years ago. His mother is still alive and lives in Nevada.

Carving a headstone seems exceptional for those who lack the gift of thinking of art in three dimensions. Such thinking and execution forms the backbone of Berenson's life.

It wasn't always that way. His route to sculpting and a life in art was both obvious and circuitous. His route to becoming a master sculptor included time in the Army, and also as a diesel mechanic.

Berenson graduated from Waukesha North High School in 1982. He came from a military family and enlisted in the Army following high school.

The Army trained Berenson as a diesel mechanic, and he served in Germany. He toured castles and cathedrals while overseas, and said he wonders if that's where his passion for sculpting got its first spark.

Berenson's body betrayed him during his time in the Army. He was diagnosed with reactive arthritis, and

"The biggest thrill is when the client receives what they asked me to sculpt for them and I see their face or hear a reaction."

— Bryan Berenson,  
master sculptor

his condition grew progressively worse.

He left the military, returned to Wisconsin and worked locally as a diesel mechanic. Eventually, the work became too much for his body, and he moved on.

## 'The light bulb went on'

Carving and artistry were always in his blood — dating back to his time in high school — but it took a trip overseas with his wife, Jennifer, to change everything.

"I didn't know for sure until my wife and I went overseas and visited that school in Austria," Berenson said. "We went over for two weeks, and I took a course.

"When I was in that course, the light bulb went on. This was the career I wanted to follow."

Berenson and his wife ventured overseas in 1999. He served a five-year-long apprenticeship at the Geisler-Moroder Woodcarving School in Elbigenalp, Austria, in the state of Tyrol in western Austria.

According to his website — <http://btbsculptor.com> — Berenson became certified as a wood and stone sculptor upon passing an eight-hour-long examination in

2004.

Berenson took master examination preparation courses at the Geisler Moroder Woodcarving School in 2013 and 2014 and, in 2015, passed the rigorous master sculptor's examination and earned the title of master sculptor. The certified title is honored throughout Europe.

"I have a passion for what I am doing," Berenson said. "I love the whole process. The biggest thrill is when the client receives what they asked me to sculpt for them and I see their face or hear a reaction.

"That gives me the greatest satisfaction."

Berenson said he loves the smell of both wood and stone as he carves. He also enjoys the process of coming up with a design.

He said his favorite medium is wood, but he also enjoys marble, and his work is done with mallet and chisel.

"The process hasn't changed too much over the years," Berenson said. "I don't do anything mass-produced. I don't use CNC machining.

"Other than that, the process has pretty been the same since Michelangelo."

Berenson said he derives his livelihood from doing work for a church supply company that hires him to restore statues, and also through private commissions.

It took Berenson several years and a different career before he found his calling. He does not intend to quit what he is doing anytime soon.

"I'll do this until the day I die, if I can," Berenson said. "Until I no longer can."



Submitted photos

Master Sculptor Bryan Berenson is at home working with both stone and wood.



Bryan Berenson works with a church supply company to restore statues, as well as on private commissions.