

Former state senator finds colorful escape through stained glass work

Tim Flakoll has been in the public eye for years in state government, higher education and F-M Redhawks baseball. Now he has his eye on making and giving away beautiful stained glass works of art.



David Samson/The Forum

A stained glass dragonfly lamp is one of Tim Flakoll's favorite pieces he has created displayed in his north Fargo home.



David Samson/The Forum

Tim Flakoll's home is decorated with his handmade stained glass creations.



Contributed / Tim Flakoll

Tim Flakoll made a stained glass window for his hometown church, Bethlehem Lutheran in Forbes, North Dakota. "Mom is pointing to a small stone that I inserted that came from the Garden of Gethsemane and Dad is pointing to a small section of brick from his parents house where he grew up. Through the window is the spot where Mom who died July 16th is buried," Flakoll said.



David Samson/The Forum

Stained glass work displayed in the bathroom space in Tim Flakoll's home.



David Samson/The Forum
A stained glass piece is displayed in the Tim Flakoll home in north Fargo.



David Samson/The Forum
Stained glass art hangs in Tim Flakoll's north Fargo home.

FARGO

FARGO He ended our phone conversation that day with; "I just hope it won't be overcast that day."

It might seem odd that Tim Flakoll, the current provost of the Tri-College University System, a longtime state senator from North Dakota, and the former vice president of the Fargo-Moorhead Redhawks, would care much about cloudy skies for an indoor interview.

After all, that's what we were doing with him that day - an interview like he's done countless times over the years.

But that day was different.

The interview was inside Flakoll's nearly century old house in north Fargo and it wasn't about North Dakota politics, education or the business of baseball, it was about stained glass.

Flakoll's home is filled with stained glass windows – most of his own making. When the skies are right, not overcast, they illuminate the interior of the home as the sun rises and sets each day.

The windows come to life here – seven of them – in floral designs or geometric shapes and patterns.

But it's not just the windows. Flakoll has made many other items including a beautiful dragonfly lamp that sits atop a small table in the bedroom.

But how does a man who studied at MIT, Harvard and Oxford find himself turning away from budgets and fiscal management to producing beautiful works of stained glass art? "A family member once told me I needed to find another hobby," he said with a smile. "They gave me classes in stained glass. We'd meet every Tuesday from 7 to 9 p.m. at Light enders on 10th Street. It was really fun because not only did I learn it, but it was a good group of people."

And his love of working with stained glass just grew from there.

Twenty-five years later, his house is a kaleidoscope of stained glass colors.

Flakoll said while his stained glass hobby might seem very different from the work he does for a living, he said in some ways they're very similar. In both realms – business projects or stained glass ones – you need to begin with the end goal in mind, by drawing it out on paper in front of you as you start to envision what it will be.

It's like running a business or organization in other ways too.

"Not every person, no matter how amazing they are, are a good fit for every job, similarly stained-glass pieces no matter how standalone perfect they are, never work for every need. You have to determine what mix and combination allows you to reach your end goal," he said.

Flakoll said he also likes the predictability of stained glass work. You can work on it, but then if life and work get too busy, you shut it down for a day, week, month or a year then come back to it with no harm done. It's also a mindful way to deal with the stressors of life in politics, business and education.

"It's a nice deviation from so-called real life.

It's escapism. I work at my workshop in the basement.

My dad and I made a table down there, and I could just go down and listen to the radio. That's the only thing down there and I just work away at my own pace and not feel pressured," he said.

He doesn't do commercial work.

"It would take the fun out of it. I just make it for friends and family. I don't want it to feel like a big project."

He's donated many pieces, including a piece he made of Roger Maris in his famous swing stance that he gave to the Roger Maris auction.

He's also donated his works – including stained glass windows – to churches in his hometown of Forbes, North Dakota.

"It's another way of adding to the quality of the service. Pictures help tell stories. It gives kids something to look at before church starts and it's a conversation piece," Flakoll said. "It's a nice little

hidden gem. People have come from around the area into the church, and they're surprised that a small community would have something like this."

Flakoll said, in a way, it's also a way to honor people who have died, including his former teacher Ruth Redlin who helped inspire his love of art. More than a half-century after being her student, Flakoll hung some of her paintings in his home.

In addition to the stained glass work and his teacher's paintings, his home is filled with memories and history – from his grandfather's coat from World War I to his father's slide rule autographed by astronaut Buzz Aldrin to stones from the Garden of Gethsemane, "It helps me to just trigger so many memories.

It's like having a QR code at every station. And I can think of a story behind this or that. This piece is of my parents' hands. It's amazing. Now that my mom has passed away, it's one of the first things that I'd grab if my house started on fire."

But everything was just fine at Tim Flakoll's house that day. No fire.

Instead the Christmas decorations were up. The stockings hung by the fireplace and the lights twinkled. And so did the stained glass windows.

By the way, it did turn out to be overcast that day, just like Flakoll had hoped it wouldn't be.

But it didn't seem to matter much. The muted, hazy sunlight still peeked through the stained glass windows and made colorful patterns on the walls and carpets, adding holiday spirit to the north Fargo home of the politician and provost turned stained glass artist.