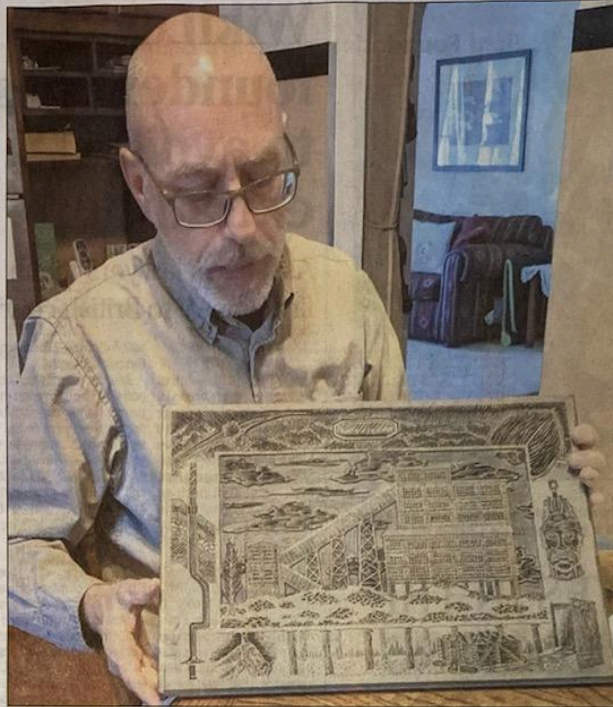


WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2024



CHRIS KELLY / STAFF PHOTO

Mark Ciocca, an Old Forge artist, is donating 50% of sales of a trio of historical prints to Underground Miners, a nonprofit dedicated to preserving anthracite mining history.

PLUMBING LINES AS WELL AS MINES

With coal in his blood, Old Forge artist donates part of sales of historic prints.

Mark Ciocca draws lines that are meant to be crossed.

In ink as black and sharp as anthracite, the artist connects with his Northeast Pennsylvania heritage like a miner tapping veins in paper. Mark has coal in his blood.

"It goes back to my grandfather, Frank Ciocca, an Italian immigrant," he said as we chatted Tuesday in the kitchen of



CHRIS
KELLY

Kelly's World

his Old Forge home.

"During the Depression, he had a bakery in Philadelphia that went down, and the only jobs available from what he understood were in Northeast Pa., the anthracite coal mining. So that brought him to Scranton. ... He spent the rest of his adult life working in the mines and he eventually succumbed to black lung."

Frank Ciocca's grandson found a career in art. Mark recently retired after 38 years of teaching in the Pocono Mountain School District and as an adjunct professor at Keystone College. A widely acclaimed artist, his linocuts, screen prints and pen-and-ink drawings are astonishing in their detail and precision.

Mark, 61, still teaches through programs such as Arts in Education and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. He's serving an art residency at the Gino J. Merli Veterans Center in Scranton, where he teaches painting to veterans.

It all makes for a pleasing present, but Mark and Tiffany, his wife of 18 years, have made a pretty good business out of the

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KELLY: Half of proceeds of prints to benefit Underground Miners

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past. His prints and other products are available on his website, his Facebook page and at On&On Scranton, my favorite stop in Pine Brook. Tiffany said Mark's top seller is his take on the Electric City sign stamped on a magnet.

The reason for my visit on Tuesday was Mark's partnership with Underground Miners, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and promoting the coal

mining heritage of the region. It's a dedicated group that reclaimed the Brooks Mine at Nay Aug Park and the stories of the men who toiled in the mines.

Mark agreed to donate 50% of sales for prints for three of his works, "Brooks Mine at Nay Aug Park," "Lackawanna County Coal Mine Tour" and "Anthracite Heritage." The cardstock prints come in 5-by-7, 8-by-10 and 11-by-14, priced from \$8 to \$14 at On&On,

1138 Capouse Ave., Scranton. "I like the connection with the Underground Miners," Mark said. "They keep it alive. They're promoting and preserving our history."

So is Mark. With every new piece that reflects the past, he tells the stories of the people who built this region and powered the Industrial Revolution, invented organized labor and made the expansion of America possible.

It's Frank Ciocca's story,

and his grandson's, too.

"It's part of our persona," he said. "And I think through the process of creating, it comes out. Sometimes in retrospect, you think, 'Oh, that was my line from that point to this point, like the lines I make in ink and printing.'"

"It's not always a direct line. Sometimes it's a little to the left or a little to the right or a zigzag but it all comes together. ... It's like the stories we hear from people at

our sales about their heritage. It's all connected."

You can see it where the lines cross.

CHRIS KELLY, the Times-Tribune columnist, crosses

lines for a living. Read his award-winning blog at timestribuneblogs.com/kelly. Contact the writer: ckelly@scranton-times.com; [@ckjink](https://twitter.com/ckjink) on Twitter; Chris Kelly, The Times-Tribune on Facebook.