Dennis Jackson put Indiana artists on the chart

Dennis Jackson had a notion of his life’s vocation when he was a boy growing up on the outskirts of Cincinnati.

“When I was 12 Dad bought a farm and we started going to purebred live stock auctions. I was mesmerized that an auctioneer could sell a cow and a calf for $800 every minute,” said Jackson, founder of Jackson’s Auction Co., known as “America’s premier auctioneer of Indiana art.”

Jackson was ready to attend auction school right out of high school, but he abided by his father’s expectations that he would get a college degree.

“That was his dream for his kids and I did it, but in the back of my mind the auction was always there,” said Jackson.

A college degree led to a career as a schoolteacher in special education, for two years in Ohio and then in the Anderson, Ind., public school system. Yet Jackson spent the summer after his first year of teaching attending Nashville Auction School in Nashville, Tenn. He then had to wait six more months before the Indiana licensing test was administered again in January 1971.

While keeping his teaching job, Jackson began working with Wayne Phenis, a veteran auctioneer from Jackson. “I worked with him as an unofficial partner for 11 years until his death,” said Jackson.

In the meantime Jackson turned down what he once envisioned as his dream job, to go into the local auctioneer business. “He would have绰ough spending time with his three grandchildren. I like sports – I'm a baseball fan and follow the Cincinnati Reds. I like the Colts, we have season tickets.

AW: Are you a collector?
DJ: No. Not really. I have a few pieces of Indiana art that we're both privy to. After that, I'm probably not a collector.

AW: Do you attend other auctions?
DJ: hairy. I will go to the auction block is when my kids tell me I'm no longer what I should be up there. They will tell me if I ran weekly here's what the cost would be,” said Jackson, who decided to run a series of four-color advertisements titled Notes & Quo.

“We ran it weakly for a year and it was very effective. Now we are using it as we need it leading up to certain auctions,” said Jackson.

Jackson ran the 2-column by 5in ads in the run-up to his first big auction as Jacksons’ Auction Co. So I went to Antiques and Auctions and said that it will kill me. They told me if I ran weekly here's what the cost would be,” said Jackson.

AW: Is your retirement imminent?
DJ: What would you be if you were not an auctioneer?
DJ: I'm sure I'd be teaching school. I'd probably be a retired schoolteacher.

AW: What would do you enjoy doing in your spare time?
DJ: I like spending time with my three grandchildren. I like sports – I'm a baseball fan and follow the Chicago Cubs. I like playing golf and love to be outside.

Getting to know Dennis Jackson

AntiqueWeek: Which do you prefer, gallery or stock auctions.
DJ: T.C. Steele painting sell for $2,500 on a Tuesday afternoon,” said Jackson. “It was like a lightbulb came in my head and I realized somebody should be selling Indiana art at auctions in Indiana.

Jackson began asking a lot of questions of gallery owners, collectors and museum curators. Everyone told him the same thing. Art auctions will not work in Indiana. They are for Chicago, New York, Miami and San Francisco, not Anderson, Ind., or even Indianapolis.

Uncle was a great story teller. He had the whole family by his stories, Jackson went against the prevailing opinion.

“I put an ad in AntiqueWeek saying I was going to have an Indiana art auc-

tion. That was the highlight of my first auctions in Indiana. Jackson had turned down what he once envisioned as his dream job, to go into the local auctioneer business. “He would have wanted spending time with his three grandchildren. I like sports – I'm a baseball fan and follow the Cincinnati Reds. I like the Colts, we have season tickets.

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AW: What do you hope you never sell again?
DJ: Live turkeys. How do you like that for a quick sale?

AW: What's the best compliment an auctioneer can give you?
DJ: For them to say, “You were right. The piece I bought. I love it. It's perfect for me and what you told me about it was right.”

AW: Is your retirement imminent?
DJ: My retirement from actually selling on the auction block is when my kids tell me no longer what I should be up there. They will tell me if I slip and when it's time to come down and work the ring.

Consignments started rolling in and art collectors came to buy. Within three years Jackson was conducting three Indiana art auctions per year.

When General Motors began downsizing operations in Anderson in the late 1980s, Jackson sensed the impending economic downturn and sold his auction gallery.

In 1991 he helped found Jackson and Wickliff Auctioneers Inc. in Carmel, Ind., an upscale suburb of Indianapolis.

“We [with owner Sue Wickliff] built a purring Indiana auction company here,” said Jackson. He remained there as partner in name and head auctioneer until he resigned in March 2004.

Selling a T.C. Steele painting for $2,500 was a 12 percent buyer’s premium was Jackson’s crowning achievement before leaving Jackson & Wickliff. “That was the highlight auction because it was an estate of a lady I had sold a lot of art to here in Anderson and she had already got a lot of ideas out of Carmel, so it was a highlight to get to sell her auc-

tion,” said Jackson.

Out on his own again, Jackson knew he had to promote himself. “I knew the names of the businesspeople, the T.C. Steele and a non-piece, a Louis heartxyorpnting. No one else would have thought of that,” said Jackson.

Undaunted, he bought about 35 paintings to resell at his inaugural auction in 1981. “Midway through that sale, as I was feeling like it was successful, I announced my next Indiana art auction will be in September – and I had nothing concrete,” said Jackson. The first auction brought $3,500 as that was a leg up. The consigned. The T.C. Steele that day sold for $1,600 at Jacksons’ Auction Co., known for $800 every minute,” said Jackson.

AW: Dennis Jackson, CAI/AARE, remains as composed selling a painting for $200,000 as he is auctioning a home of comparable value. He is pictured here selling recently at his gallery on Zionsville Road in Indianapolis.


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