Dec 21 23 Questions for Alexis C. Perez – Owner of First Class Framing of Clearwater

Hello Alexis,

Thank you for participating in our interview.

Can you share some details of your childhood?

My dad was an airline captain and my family traveled all over the country. Belleiar is my hometown. I started school at South Ward Elementary and attended Dunedin Elementary as well as Dunedin Middle School, and Clearwater High School. But in between those times, I also attended schools in Alaska and Michigan. My mom loved motorcycles and she and my dad owned a Harley Davidson motorcycle dealership in Columbus, GA. Mom rode motorcycles, Dad flew planes. When my mom settled in Clearwater, she was the Parts Manager at Honda of Clearwater. She was also very involved in the community. She helped start the first Jazz Festival and designed the T-shirts. She helped with the old Safety Village on Lakeview, and she would organize road runs and motorcycle charity rides. From my parents I learned you could do anything if you put your mind to it.

How did you develop an interest in art and creating art?
I credit my older sister, Janis. She gave me a watercolor set when I was about 4 years-old. I loved it! I've always been drawn to creating and drawing. I particularly like landscapes, animals, flowers. I really enjoy painting miniatures, 5 inches or so. It takes a lot of patience and precision.

So how did you get interested in framing, Alexis?

I started picture framing in 1989 at the Ben Franklin Crafts store. I had taken about two years of woodshop at Clearwater High School. I really loved it. When I started to work at Ben Franklin in Largo, they thought I would do well in the frame shop – and I did. I just built on what I loved doing. As we moved, I always tried to work in art/framing wherever we were living. I really enjoyed and learned a lot working at Jerry's Art O Rama in Raleigh, NC. I learned a lot more about art, cataloguing, and ordering, and I became their Customer Service Advisor. I also took a number of art classes and started painting.

What do you enjoy about framing?
Well… I enjoy problem solving and working with people to create something that's beautiful. You never know what will be brought into a frame shop. Obviously, it's something that's meaningful and treasured by the owner. People are trusting me with their prized possessions. I enjoy listening to the story behind the art item and getting to know the person. To do a good job of framing, I need to help them understand options and help put the "pieces" together. It's a lot more than just putting a picture under glass. I have to understand what type of room it will be displayed in, color coordination, what is the budget… those types of things.

You currently own and operate First Class Framing of Clearwater a framing shop and art center. Can you share what's unique about your business?
It's rare to see a framing shop with local art for sale. My shop promotes local artists. I have a gallery of artwork here that brings energy to my store. Local artists also teach art classes here. My shop is called

First Class Framing – our logo is of a globe with a plane circling. It ties in with my childhood of travel. I like to call my art store "The Clearwater Artport" Your Destination for Creativity. The teachers and featured artists are "crew members." As someone enters, there are different destinations for your creativity. You can be here to frame something beautiful; you can come in to shop for art, or you can learn to create art. You choose the "destination."

What types of art classes do you offer?
Artists come in and teach a variety of classes: Painting; fused glass; alcohol ink; macrame; educational one day workshops; fun painting parties. Anyone interested in classes can check our Facebook page for current offerings. Additionally, our classroom is available to rent for any type of small class, language classes, tutoring, sewing, or club meetings. Just reach out to me to check availability.

How can readers learn more about art classes offered at your shop?
It's best to visit the website or follow me on Facebook (First Class Framing). I promote the classes on social media. But people can always give me a call at: 727-831-0966.

What do you have coming up?
I'm having my first art show and Open House on January 13 from 5-7 p.m. This will be a juried show. The whole month of January, though, I'll be promoting the shop and our art and local artists. Stay tuned!

As a small business owner in Clearwater, what do you like about operating in our City?
I love the people in Clearwater. I love that I have childhood memories here and this is home. I married my husband, Jaime Perez, who is a USMC Veteran. He is on the board of Pinellas Toys for Tots. He was also the commandant of the Morris F. Dixon Jr. Detachment 54 a few years ago. We love helping the community. We opened this shop to keep busy after we retire and to help others at the same time. Veterans and First Responders always get a 25% discount.

We both want to help local artists and the area by giving the community a place to be creative. My associate, Lyle Polyak, Design Consultant and owner of TMAF Art & Design, LLC has the same ambitions. He organizes local art shows as well as having a complete art printing service, including signs and promotional flyers and business cards. His shop is just across the street; he offers printing, and I can help with framing. We both have developed great relationships with the local art scene.

Clearwater is building up so fast! All of these new residents are going to want art in their homes, and we're here to help. We hope we can be a big part of the creativity of Clearwater.

Is there anything the City of Clearwater could do better or differently to help you and your business?
I, and many small business owners I know, find Clearwater's signage ordinance to be too restrictive. Many small businesses are located in strip malls, or on busy streets, or they may be tucked back off a main street. We need to be able to signal to the public that we are here. We want to welcome and invite customers to come check us out. Flexibility on signage would be great and would really make a difference.

Fun questions:

Favorite restaurant? I have two: Rumbas and a K-picu International Fusion Cuisine on Belcher Road. Their food is absolutely delicious. It's chef operated, they only have about 10 tables, but the food is authentic and delicious.

Favorite sports team?
Rays and Lightning.

Favorite music? Everything Jazz! But really, I like all kinds of music.

Favorite artist?
That's a tough question. Traditionals – Alphonse Mucha, Louis C. Tiffany, Claude Monet; Contemporary- Pablo Marcos, Drew Friedman, Frank Frazetta; Local – Christopher M. Still, Georgy Kurosav.

Favorite authors?
C.S. Lewis; J.R.R. Tolkien, Ray Bradbury, Kurt Vonnegut Jr. But honestly, I have not had time to sit down and read a good book in years….

Best museum in the region?
I really enjoy natural history museums. But locally, I like the James Museum of Western & Wildlife Art.

Favorite quote or motto you live by?
I like just about anything Ted Roosevelt ever said… but this sums them all up!

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."