



JEFF TAYLOR/The Winchester Star

Artist Aaron Riddle works on a drawing of his daughters in the basement studio of his Frederick County home. Riddle's cartoons can be found at www.buyadrawing.com.

Man gets 'good, humble' feeling creating cartoons

BY JACKIE PUGLISI
The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — Aaron Riddle's cartoons are zany, quirky and nonsensical — and people love them.

Whether it is a pig driving a go-cart, a Superman father soaring through the sky with his infant son on his back or a hedgehog proposing marriage, the Frederick County resident has created it all for his clients through his website www.buyadrawing.com.

Buy a Drawing lets customers describe exactly what they are looking for, and then Riddle creates a cartoon drawing based on the description.

"Some are crazy, oddball descriptions and I love that," Riddle said.

One customer requested a drawing of himself and his wife with their separate bowling teams. The cartoon showed the couple holding bowling balls alongside fictional characters from the TV show "Game of Thrones," the "Star Wars" movies and other flicks.

"It's always something different," Riddle said.

After receiving a customer's description, Riddle will reach out to ask questions and request photos to make the cartoon as accurate as possible.

From there, he starts drawing. He isn't sure where his inspiration comes from when he starts to draw. It simply pops into his head.

"It's just there," he said. "It just appears. [My customers] trust me

to draw it however I see it in my mind."

The cartoons are all drawn by hand. Riddle then scans the finished product to his computer and digitally adds color using Adobe Photoshop editing software. Everyone who requests a drawing receives the original artwork with an option to purchase digital color copies.

Riddle describes his work as a mix of political cartoons — characters with exaggerated features — and classic cartoons like Looney Tunes.

Before launching Buy a Drawing, Riddle spent time as a freelancer, creating logos and graphics for businesses. However, he didn't

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get the satisfaction out of the work that he does as a cartoonist.

"It's not a warm and fuzzy, doing-it-for-the-greater-good feeling [when I design logos]," he said. "But when I can draw for a co-worker or a friend, I get that good, humble feeling."

Riddle receives a lot of positive feedback from his cartoons. Customers have also sent him pictures of themselves holding their drawings.

"I'm always humbled by their reactions," he said.

The 36-year-old's love of drawing started at a young age. Some of his first memories include sitting on the floor at home drawing on a large pad of paper around the age of 3 or 4.

As a child, Riddle spent his evenings drawing his favorite superheroes, including Batman and Superman. He started out tracing the characters and then drew them by hand as his skill improved.

He often drew for his friends. Growing up in the grunge era of the early 1990s, he remembers drawing his friends in ripped jeans getting into trouble.

"Some of my friends still have my drawings," he said.

Starting in 1998, Riddle drew a weekly web comic called "AFORD: Out of the Shell" that ran for 10 years at www.afordturtle.com. The comic strip, which follows the story of Aford T. Turtle and his friends, also appeared in a few dozen newspapers across the country.

The Baltimore native moved to Frederick County with his wife, Christie, in 2005. He took a full-time job as a graphic design and digital media specialist at Lord Fairfax Community College, where he still works today. After his daughters, Corinne and Caitlin, were born he decided to put cartooning on hold for a while.



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Frederick County artist Aaron Riddle scans his pen-and-ink drawings into his computer and then uses Adobe PhotoShop to add the colors.



Riddle works on a drawing of his daughters. Riddle is a graphic design and digital media specialist at Lord Fairfax Community College.

Starting in 2009, Riddle worked part time as a wedding photographer, but he found it took too much time away from his family. He recalled one year photographing 40 weddings.

As his children grew older, he thought about getting back into drawing.

"Once I get something in my mind, I can't let it go," he said. "Sometimes it works too well."



This is Riddle's artwork for a customer who requested her husband be drawn dressed as Superman and carrying their new baby. Riddle scans the finished drawing to his computer and digitally adds color using Adobe Photoshop.

Riddle got back into drawing about two years ago and started selling his creations on the website Etsy. From there, he launched Buy a Drawing. Since launching the site, he has a lot more time at home with his family.

On average, he draws about two to three cartoons a week. Since he started selling his cartoons online a couple years ago,

he has created about 200 drawings.

In Riddle's spare time, different characters will pop into his mind. Some of these cartoons are featured on greeting cards, which are also for sale on his website.

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