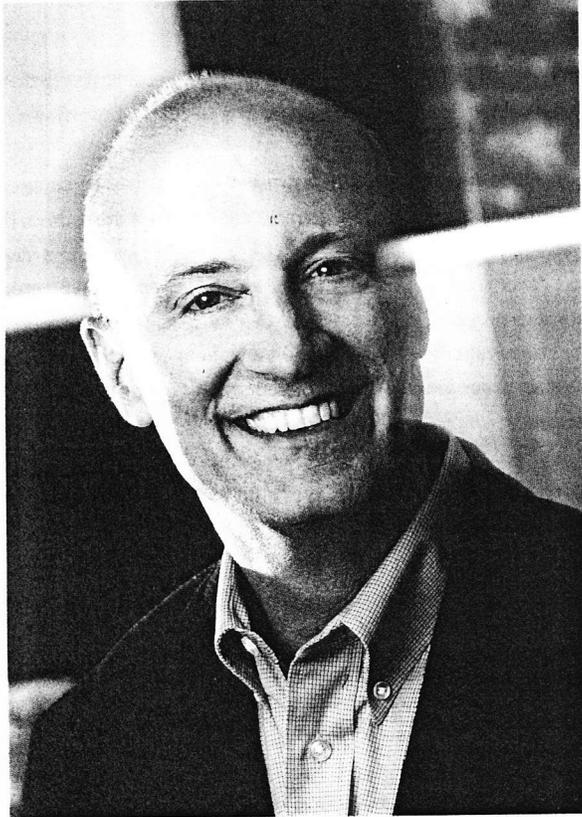


A TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIEL KULLMAN

TEXT BY MARY KELLY



ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT PLAN for a career in the painting and decorative art business, Steve Ragsdale has no regrets that this became his life's work. As the founder of Ragsdale, Inc. in Lake Bluff nearly thirty years ago, Steve has taken the company from its humble beginnings as a one-man painting operation to what it is today—one of the finest painting, restoration and decorative art companies on the North Shore.

The Ragsdale family moved to Lake Forest in the summer of 1968, just before Steve was to start his freshman year at Lake Forest High School. It was also the year before he contracted his first painting job in town. "Actually, it was a house and small barn," says Steve. "The home belonged to the Wagner family and was on the corner of Telegraph and Old Mill Roads. The house is still standing and the paint job still looks pretty good," he adds, jokingly. Steve fondly recalls that Mrs. Wagner would occasionally stick her head out of the door around lunch time and toss him the keys to her '67 Corvair Monza convertible, along with a little lunch money, for a run to the McDonalds on 41. Definitely the high point of that summer job... I was still 15 and did not yet have a driver's license." Ragsdale has done a few more paint jobs in town since then... a few thousand more!

Ragsdale's company is unique in the depth and breadth of their abilities. They employ some of the most talented artisans and craftsmen in the business and produce stunning results. "I believe that what sets us apart," says Steve, "is the fact that we really do it all. We employ a process approach to

our work that is rooted in "Old World" craftsmanship. From thorough surface preparation, restoration and base coat painting, through the most complex decorative finishes, we do it all. We have extensive experience in technical coatings, lacquer and metal leaf, and also have a complete woodworking and finishing shop which allows us to fabricate repairs and perform off-site finishing of cabinetry and furniture. To my knowledge, we stand alone among local contractors in our ability to provide this level of service. Also, our production superintendent personally installs all the wall paper work we do. Our results are exceptionally consistent. Our business is all about service, communication and trust. Having lived in the community most of my life, I have a unique perspective as to our clients' needs and expectations; and each day we strive to exceed them." Steve says. In fact, several of their North Shore clients with second and third homes in other parts of the country opt to send Ragsdale crews to work on them, so to ensure that their high standards will be met.

Nearly thirty years after he "officially" incorporated, the business he built fits him like a glove. "I'm a pretty creative guy; our business provides me an outlet to express that creativity on a daily basis. It also allows me to continue to be an active part of the community in which my wife and I grew up, and where we've been fortunate enough to raise our children."

"There are so many aspects of our work that I find rewarding," Steve continued. "I am delighted to be able to provide consistent employment to our employees and to see their families prosper. I take great pride in the quality of the service we deliver and am really thrilled each time I hear one of our customers say how much they have enjoyed having us in their home. To me, that is the ultimate success." Steve lives in Lake Bluff where he and his wife, Sandy, have raised their three children. He has served on the board of the Lake Forest/Lake Bluff Noon Rotary Club, as co-president of CenterStage in Lake Forest, and as Moderator of the Union Church of Lake Bluff. He also performs with the local singing group, "The Buckthorns," whose purpose is to spread joy through music while raising money for charity.

Ragsdale, Inc. is located at 709 Sheridan Road in Lake Bluff, 847.234.4567.

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