



BLACK HISTORY MAKERS

In conjunction with Black History Month, this feature will appear Monday through Friday throughout February to call attention to some of the many Philadelphia-area African-Americans who are making history through their impact on the community.

Occupation: Longtime salesman for major corporations, including Sears and Kraft Foods. About three years ago started his own home-based greeting card business, JonMar Creations. He now creates and sells a line of Afrocentric cards. Sales have been to small shops and chain stores nationwide.

Residence: Willingboro, N.J.

Age: 49.

Roots: West Philadelphia native. Father is a retired Philadelphia cop. Graduate of John Bartram High School and Temple University. Degree in business administration.

JOHN ERVING JR.

Duties: Has developed latent art talents and painted about half of the 60 cards created by his firm. Along with wife, Margaret, friends and others, creates verse and card messages. Has a network of sales representatives but is always out trying to find new customers.

Accomplishments: Developing as artist. "I'm self-taught. I've learned through trial and error and surrounded myself with good artists. Now I'm the featured artist of the Willingboro Art Alliance. Basically, I'm a salesman. I landed a Christmas card deal with 20 CVS pharmacies, and they sold out."

Obstacles: Getting financing. "My own bank turned me down." But did get \$30,000 state loan.

Decisions: Quitting a well-paying job with full benefits. "Having the courage to quit was hard. But I wasn't fulfilled. It took a lot of courage to quit. I agonized and prayed about it. Then I just closed my eyes and did it."

Advice to young: "Learn the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. You may have great ideas, but if you can't communicate and express them, you won't succeed. Think in terms of owning your own business. Working in the corporate world

is good for experience. But when you are working for yourself, it's a labor of love. You are working and don't even know you are working. Do what you really love. That's the bottom line."

Elements of success: "You must have a plan and be focused on some clear objectives. And — let's face it — a little luck is important."

Epitaph: "On my tombstone it will say, 'Salesman.' I love to sell."

—By Ron Avery

