

June 15, 2007

## **Limberis name plastered all over downtown Fort Pierce**

**BYLINE:** **Bill Church** correspondent

A grandfather-grandson duo, working with little fanfare, have played key roles in first creating, and then recreating, historic downtown Fort Pierce over the past century.

The thousands of downtown Fort Pierce workers and tourists who walk around with eyes down may miss the artistry and craftsmanship of Nicholas and

Marty Limberis. Those who take a moment to look up, however, are rewarded with a glimpse of the stucco work and carefully molded artistic medallions

and sculptures which make the downtown buildings truly unique.

Nicholas Limberis, who died in 1976 at the age of 97, came to America in 1888 as a nine-year-old stowaway on a cargo ship from Greece. After working at

his uncle's New York cigar store for a few years, the teenager joined his brothers in Eustis, near Orlando. He then ventured further south in the first

decade of the 20th Century to an area on Route 1 near the present St. Lucie County-Indian River County line, where he homesteaded some land and

purchased more.

Having learned the plastering and stucco trade from his father in Greece, Nicholas began Limberis Plastering. He proved to be much more than a plasterer.

He was also a natural artist, who, with no formal training, developed the skill of making sculptures, using chicken wire to form a mold and mixing Portland cement, lime, sand, and water to make a mud.

His mushroom sculptures became famous, especially as birdbaths. He also created animals and birds, making each by hand with just an hour with

which to work before the material hardened.

His most visible work lives today on buildings throughout downtown Fort Pierce. He worked extensively with famed architect William Hatcher who

designed many of these buildings.

Marty Limberis was a child of 10 when he began watching his grandfather work and helping him

mix cement and water in a big tub. He also learned the art of making sculptures from the master before he passed away when Marty was just 17.

Now 48, Marty is founder and owner of Marty Limberis Plastering. With the rebirth of downtown Fort Pierce over the past decade, Marty has played a key role in restoring historic buildings. Much of that work has involved remaking and saving the original work of his own grandfather.

"When someone is looking to refurbish a historic building they see the Limberis name in the history books," Marty said. "I can match any of the old textures and sculptures, I have many of my grandfather's original molds, and I can make new molds. I meet the criteria for historic preservation."

Some of the famous buildings featuring the work of both grandfather and grandson include:

- \* The Arcade Building on Route 1
- \* Old City Hall
- \* Raulerson Building at Second Street and Avenue A
- \* Kraaz & Kraaz Building next door
- \* Original Coast Guard station on Seaway Drive, Hutchinson Island

Probably no building shows off Grandfather Nicholas' work more than the Arcade Building on Route 1. He made the colored blocks that surround the main entrance and the shield over the entrance, as well as the ship sculptures that dot the building.

To renovate the building, Marty took down about 30 percent of the wall work and remade it using old molds. For the rest, he touched up and tuck-pointed, re-carving everything to make it look as it did in 1925.

For the four-story Kraaz & Kraaz Building, Marty duplicated his grandfather's medallion from Old City Hall.

Nicholas did all of the interior and exterior plaster and stucco work on the old Coast Guard Station, now the Indian River Community College Marine Science Center. Marty restored it.

Marty has also done either interior plastering or exterior stucco work on Old City Hall, the restored Sunrise Theater, the Seven Gables House visitor's center on Indian River Drive, and the extensive restoration of virtually all the commercial block of Orange Avenue between Second Avenue and the railroad tracks.

The 307 Orange Avenue building shows what Limberis can do. It was also a case of history repeating itself.

The grandfather of Philip C. "Flip" Gates constructed the building and hired Marty's grandfather to install capitals on the building's columns.

In 2005 and 2006, Gates, an architectural enthusiast, hired Marty to repair the badly damaged capitals. Using just a piece of old concrete cut off one capital, Marty made a new mold and re-created the capitals to look just as they did when new.

After graduating from Fort Pierce Central High School in 1976, Marty went to work as a laborer for East Coast Plastering. He credits owner Paul Goodman with teaching him the plastering trade.

In 1990, Marty went out on his own and has grown the business to eight full time workers and a service area that covers Florida with occasional jobs in Alabama and South Carolina.

Marty says his is one of the last interior plastering companies in Florida. Most home builders now use drywall. His artistry with exterior stucco and historical renovation has set him apart, however, and he continues to be a "hands-on" contractor.

Limberis says the materials have improved since his grandfather's day, with cements that provide better workability and elasticity, as well as improved waterproofing. But the sand, he said, was actually better in the old days.

Copyright, 2008, Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers, Used here with permission. No additional reproduction or distribution of this article in any form is permitted without the written approval of Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers (<http://www.tcpalm.com>).