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## Toledo-area photographer loves his work, specializes in people

By Dawn Wolfe

Unlike some people who grow up knowing what they want to do as a career, Kurt Nielsen found his passion for photography by accident while in college. After spending two years in design and drafting, "I decided I didn't like the math that much so I switched to marketing and advertising," he said. It was during a group project for one of his classes that Kurt discovered photography.

"We were doing a photo shoot downtown and I was taking the pictures and started thinking, 'This is really kind of cool,' so I started getting into it more and more – but it was just a hobby at that point," he remembered. While still in college, Kurt took some photography classes and got his first paying photography-related job as a lab tech at the school, where he worked developing pictures.

Still, Kurt continued thinking of photography as a hobby and was working as a drafter in a machine shop when he saw an ad for a national chain photography studio. "I thought, 'Why am I still doing this [drafting]?', he said, and when he applied for the job he was one of only two people who had a portfolio of work to bring to his interview. "I worked for them for a year and nine months, and that's when I started getting into children and family portraits," he explained. "Within six months I was nominated for top photographer in my area." That recognition is just one of the awards Kurt has been nominated for and/or won – he was a WeddingWire Bride's Choice top pick in 2011 and was picked by The Knot for its "best of weddings" awards for both 2011 and 2012.

Between his first photography job and another national chain, Kurt worked for corporate-owned photography studios for a bit over ten years before, "...getting tired of the corporate BS" and the limitations his employers were placing on the time he got to spend with clients and his creativity in working with them. The final straw came when his last employer asked Kurt to create a business plan to help them improve their operation. "I spent two, two and a half weeks working on it but when I gave it to them they told me it would never work," he remembered, chuckling. "So the business plan I wrote for them became my plan for my business."

"About a year and a half after I opened my shop they actually came to me and asked if they could put their name on my business," Kurt added, "but I told them that they had had their chance. They aren't in business anymore."

Having been in business for himself since October of 1997, Kurt said that he still loves what he does. "You have to," he explained, "because you work some crazy hours. I've gone as high as 120 hours in a week," shooting on location both locally and all over the country. In addition to the paying work he does, Kurt also supports charities including the Epilepsy Center, the Ronald McDonald House, and the Heart Association.

Kurt said that working with people is definitely his specialty and that, "...about three-quarters of my job is distraction – getting people to open up and be relaxed." Kurt explained that clients from brides to seniors want to make sure that the photos of them he takes reflect their

personalities and that they don't end up with the same kinds of photos their friends have had taken. Asked about photographing children in particular, Kurt shook his head and chuckled. "The things I've seen ..." he said, "Almost nothing surprises me when it comes to children – the things they say, the things they do."

In addition to standard photography services, Kurt offers two very unique products. Using a software product called Painter, Kurt can turn his photos into works of art that look just like painted portraits. "You're doing it digitally, but you're actually painting your photographs," Kurt explained, and added that even though he uses a stylus he can get the same kinds of effects he would get using a brush and paint. "Painter is like Photoshop on steroids."

Kurt also offers his clients a chance to do something very different with his Kurt's Kustom Keepsakes. Using an open-air green screen and "Hollywood technology," Kurt travels to clients' special events takes shots of the guests, and then place those shots against custom backgrounds – everything from a canyon rim or golf course to a custom background with a

caption about the event. Guests can leave with a 4X6 photo as well as downloading other sizes of the photos online.

When it comes to arranging photography for a wedding, Kurt advised getting the photographer booked about a year in advance. "The wedding sites tell you that you can get a deal if you wait ... but then you're limited to the photographers that aren't booked yet – they might still be good, but..."

*If you have found this story, interesting, informative, or inspiring, please let Kurt know! Kurt Nielsen Photography is located at 5431 Schultz Drive, Sylvania, OH 43560. (419) 885-7153, [www.kurtphoto.com/Weddings.asp](http://www.kurtphoto.com/Weddings.asp)*

