

# Sandwich artist begins to bloom

by Frank Vaisvilas  
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His passion is to make beautiful things. Sandwich muralist Eulojio "Joe" Ortega has artwork in area homes and businesses.

"A mural should set the atmosphere for wherever it is," Ortega said.

Whether the mood of the mural is peaceful and soothing in a nursery of a home or takes you back to a 1950s summer in Brenda's Frozen Custard in Plano, Ortega has worked on hundreds of commissioned pieces in the area.

He believes a mural can create an amazing feeling when people walk into a room.

The 30-year-old father of two grew up in Sandwich and has a bachelor of fine arts degree from NIU. He had worked for a Plano-based home décor business before deciding he wanted to work on his own.

Now, he does custom paintings, portraits and murals ranging from hundreds to thousands of dollars. He has been painting murals for about four years.

"I'm just beginning to take off," Ortega said.

He enjoys the more creative freedom he has now than when he worked for the agency.

"I wasn't really allowed to make things as beautiful as it could be," Ortega said.

He prefers to have control over certain aspects, such as light if he has to



Joe Ortega sits by his mural inside Brenda's Frozen Custard in Plano. More of his artwork can be seen in the Waterfront restaurant in Somonauk. (Photo by Frank Vaisvilas)

recreate a portrait, for example, from a photo. He said it can be difficult if the photo was taken from someone else or he lacks control over what he is creating.

"You just can't fabricate colors that aren't there," Ortega said.

He recently started painting oil portraits and won an honorable mention last year for one of his portraits from the Portrait Society of America.

"It's tough, tough to get in there," Ortega said. "I was just pleased because I've only been doing portraits for about a year and a half, now."

He received more encouragement recently when the editor of International Artist magazine took one look at his work and said he was high-caliber.

"I knew I was on the right track," Ortega said.

But he realizes it is important to always work to increase his skill level.

He knows how struggling it can be for an artist. He said he does not know of anyone in his NIU class who is making a living full-time in art.

"Art is probably the most expensive major with the least guarantee of success," Ortega said.

At \$24 for a tube of paint and brushes that can cost hundreds of dollars, he said the practice of making art itself can be expensive.

"I'm always amazed that I do this for a living," Ortega said.

With the Sandwich area growing, he hopes for continued success.

"I'd like to do a lot more local work," Ortega said.

Some of his work can be seen online at [www.ortegastudios.com](http://www.ortegastudios.com).