



Husband and wife stained glass artists and fabricators Mark Liebowitz and Nancy Katz in their new Pawtucket Studio behind Tolman High School on Monday afternoon. (Breeze photos by Robert Emerson)

PAWTUCKET – Nancy Katz and Mark Liebowitz were plying their crafts in western Massachusetts when Liebowitz came across an article about the wonderful things that were happening in Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

After visiting a number of potential landing spots in the city at the recommendation of local artist Morris Nathanson, the two say they couldn't be happier with their chosen new home in the Morrison Thread mill complex on Blackstone Avenue behind Tolman High School.

"It's very cool," said Katz of the new surroundings including the R.I. Spirits distillery and Burbage Theatre. "We are so happy to be in the neighborhood, and we love all the other tenants."

Nancy Katz | Wilmark Studios is a combination of Katz's art and the master craftsmanship of Liebowitz. The couple not only creates custom stained-glass windows for clients around the world, but are now hosting classes for those who want to learn art.

On a recent evening, Katz facilitated an art workshop for nearly three-dozen women on how to embellish Ikea mirrors. After cleaning up from that, she and Liebowitz were able to get back to fabricating two new sets of stained-glass windows, one for a church in Virginia and the other for a synagogue in Maine.

Stained-glass studio finds home in Morrison Thread mill

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The couple lives in a renovated Catholic school on Providence's East Side, and living and doing business in restored spaces "matches our politics," she said, with both of them loving architecture and history.

Katz said the couple has "never had such an appropriate space" for their work, with 16-foot ceilings and beautiful surroundings.

"I think this is the end of the road," she said of her belief that they've found their forever home.

The couple lives in a

The two got together more than 14 years ago, Liebowitz convincing her to use her experience as a textile artist to design stained glass. Liebowitz is classically trained, doing works for such prominent places as the National Cathedral and West Point.

"He knows his stuff," Katz said of him.

Liebowitz has been in the fabrication business for 45 years, and the Pawtucket mill is the nicest and most spacious place he's ever worked in. After World War II, there was a lot of interest in creating lasting legacies through stained glass, he said, but a lessening of that emphasis and tighter building budgets in more recent years often mean that decorative pieces are the first to go.

Church scandals have also hurt, he said, but though the business is tougher than ever, it isn't dead by any means. "Gutsy" churches that want to invest significantly in something lasting are still coming calling, he said, and the emphasis nowadays is on working within limited budgets to still create something beautiful without cutting corners or compromising.

He and Katz acknowledged city worker Herb Weiss for his help in finding this space. A tour of six mills gave a glimpse of the great things going on in Pawtucket, he said.

Katz said she "learned from master" when she partnered up with Liebowitz. She would design something and Mark would then say that it wouldn't work in glass "and this is how you make it work," she said.

She said she sees herself as an educator as well, and is looking forward to teaching others the complexities of art.

The move from the woods of western Massachusetts was necessitated in part by the couple getting older and sometimes not being able to get up their driveway due to snow and ice. They initially stumbled on Providence, said Katz, knowing nothing about its neighbor, but once they learned more about Pawtucket, including how "there's this whole arts economy" and "so much creativity," they were hooked, she said.

Katz said that they love how much historic preservation is happening here, and that there aren't sledgehammers knocking everything down.



Liebowitz works on a portion of a window, designed by Sylvia Nichols, that will hang in Saint Thomas Aquinas Church on the campus of the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. The couple creates custom stained-glass windows for a worldwide clientele and also host classes for those who want to learn how to create art.