

# Arts & Entertainment

## McConnell takes his art slowly, but sporty

By FANNIE SUNSHINE  
The Champion

As a child, Michael McConnell was artistic. Years later, the talent is still there. "I love hockey and the Indy races," he said. "I'm getting used to doing commission work. People usually ask me to do portraits."

Several years ago, Mr. McConnell tried his hand at religious painting.

"I called my painting Veronica," he recalled. "It was a picture of Jesus carrying a cross while the woman, Veronica, wiped his face."

Since then, he's worked on pictures of NHL players Felix Potvin and Doug Gilmour, race car drivers Alex Zanardi and Dario Franchitti and several TV and movie actors.

"Dario Franchitti and Alex Zanardi signed the portraits I drew of them," Mr. McConnell said. "So did Doug Gilmour. They were all excited about the work I'd done."

Most of the business that comes his way is by word of mouth.

"I just printed up business cards for McConnell Studios. Eventually, I do want to make this a full-time job. Right now I'm taking it slow."

His work ranges in price from \$100 to \$200 for a lead picture, to \$500 and into the thousands for an oil painting.

"The Veronica painting took six months. Lead pictures usually take me a day (to complete)."

### Full-time firefighter

Even though he works four days a week, 10 hours a day, at the Milton fire station, Mr. McConnell finds time to stimulate his creative side on a regular basis.

"I mostly work on thinking of ideas for my paintings," he said. "Painting is very stressful."

An example of that stress is creating specific pictures for his customers.

"Still life and landscape paintings are boring — I won't do them," he insisted. "In order for me to paint, I have to like what I'm painting."

And if someone hands him a picture to work on as a portrait, he always adds his own touch to it.

"I tweak it out," Mr. McConnell said. "Right now I'm doing a picture of Edgar Allan Poe. Everyone has seen his picture in books dozens of times. I have to find a way to make it my own."

And how does the artist describe the feeling he gets from his painting?

"It makes me feel immortal," he said, after thinking a moment for the right word. "Once I'm long gone, my paintings will still be around."

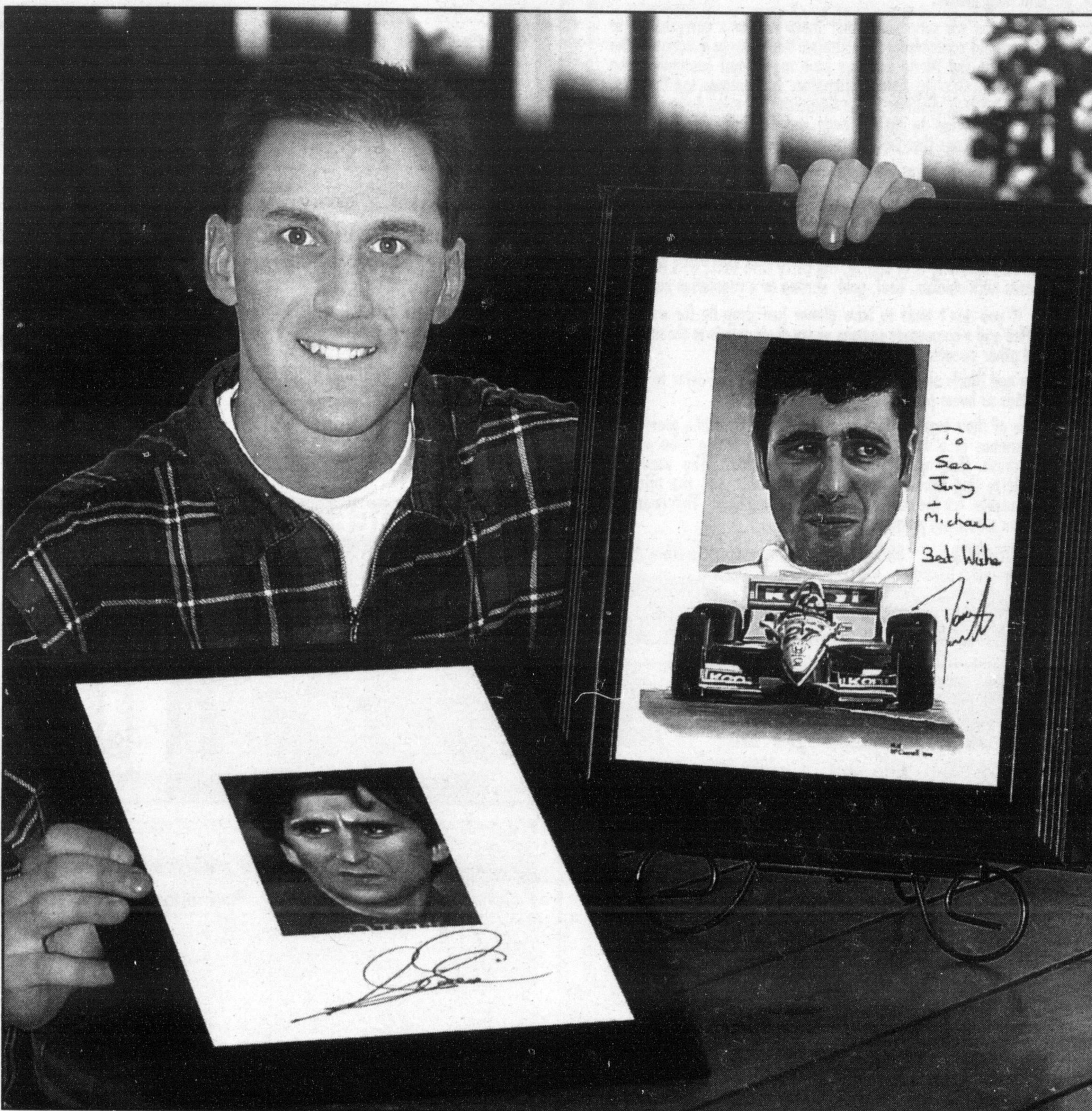


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Michael McConnell shows two of his auto racing portraits, Indy racer Dario Franchitti (right) and Formula 1 racer Alex Zanardi.

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