

## portrait of the artist

# Metal and fire fashion her art

**F**or more than 20 years, trial lawyer Karen Crouch argued cases in the courtrooms of Wilmington. During the past seven years, though, she has spent more of her time in a studio with concrete floor and walls, where she works with metal and fire. Crouch, who practiced law under the name Karen Paden Boyle and still works part-time as a mediator, has always loved working with her hands. As a child, she and her family often collaborated on projects. When Crouch grew older, however, her career took a path that led her away from art into the legal profession.

It wasn't until years later, when she crafted a rooster out of spare fence parts that she realized metal sculpture work was something she wanted to seriously pursue. Crouch says the rooster sold just hours after she finished it, leaving her with a sense of accomplishment she will never forget.

With the experience she's gained over the past seven years, Crouch, who's mostly self-taught, has seen her pieces become much larger and more elaborate. What keeps her going, she explains, is knowing someone finds value in her work. "What matters most to me is that (a piece) touches someone, and they are able to get some sort of meaning from it, whatever that might be," she says.

Married to Auley Crouch and mother to a blended family, Crouch says the process of creating is also a way to sort through her own thoughts and feelings. While she works, Crouch often will play music chosen specifically for the piece – and the feelings – she's experiencing at that time. "When I work I try to create a sense of peace in my mind and heart, which helps me to find a sense of connection to all the things going on in my life," she says.

This process often produces a sculpture completely different from the original concept. "My work definitely grows," she explains, "I can't plot it all out, but somehow it always works itself out."

Currently Crouch, 58, is spending long hours working on a 10-foot sculpture for the Lower Cape Fear Hospice. "Safe

**Karen Crouch, a former trial lawyer, now finds inspiration in metal, which she fashions into powerful sculptures. Currently, she's working on a piece to benefit the Lower Cape Fear Hospice and LifeCare Center. "Safe Passage" will be dedicated in the spring.**



Passage" will be dedicated in the spring, but until then, Crouch's pieces are on display at T.A.G. in Lumina Station. At Airlie Gardens, her creation, "Copper Tree," can be found in the bottle house, and the "Mythical Beast," guards the entrance.

Despite the hard physical work metal

sculpture entails, Crouch says her passion for the genre outweighs all the hurting, fatigue and burns she endures. She says simply, "I can't remember a time when I didn't love sculpture." ▼▼

~ Katie Roder