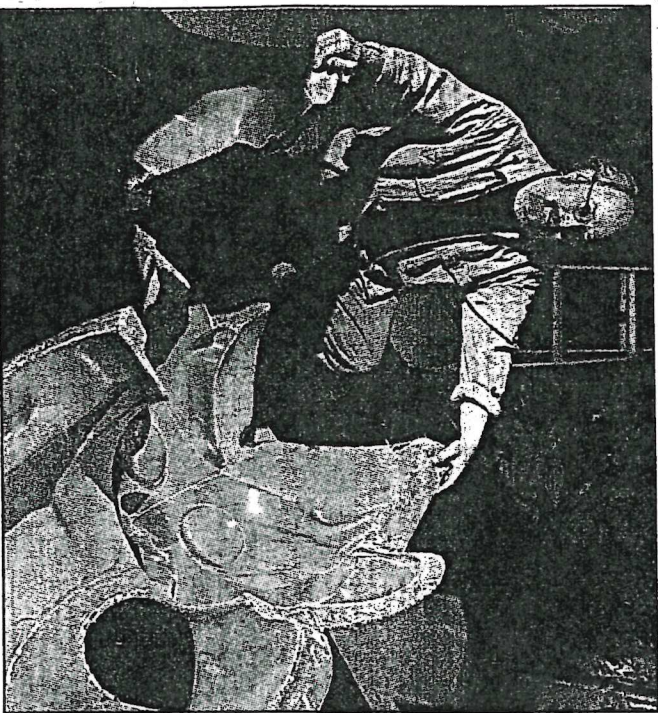


TRISTATE TOUCHSTONES
THE GLASS HAND



Eric Kilb, owner of the Glass Hand, handles a mold for Big Boy.

HIE KEEPS BIG BOY LOOKING GOOD

Tristate fiberglass artisan Eric Kilb spiffs up that familiar hamburger fella

BY MARK CURNUTTE
The Cincinnati Enquirer

The Frisch's Big Boy, that local icon, has gone Liz Taylor.

He has been plucked and tucked from the top of his white cap to the tip of his saddle shoes.

His ears are now at least 2 inches smaller and pinned back.

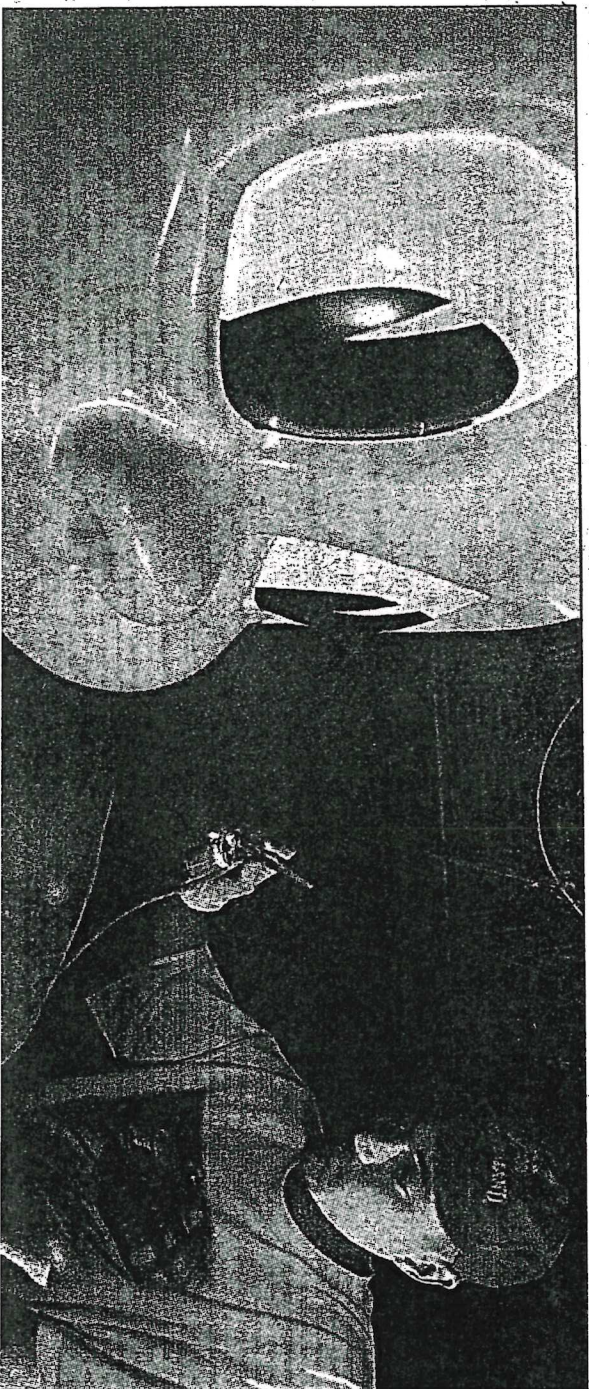
The slingshot has been cut from his hip pocket, his right buttock reshaped.

He's thinner and taller.

And, yes, the red-and-white checks on his overalls are slightly bigger.

The man behind Big Boy's plastic — er, fiberglass — surgery is Tristate artisan Eric Kilb. He owns the Glass Hand, a fiberglass fabricating company, and works out of a dusty building in a Taylor Creek junkyard.

Mr. Kilb, 37, has had a contract since





Photos by Tony Jones/The Cincinnati Enquirer
Glass Hand employee Rick Raiston Jr., a former auto painter, says, "There's not many jobs where so many people see your work."

Big Boy to be on the big screen

A Cambridge, Mass., filmmaker will light out across the United States later this year to make a documentary about Big Boy.

"It's about the people who have a fascination with this American icon," says Chris O'Donnell, 37, an Oberlin College graduate who teaches sound design at Boston University.

Mr. O'Donnell and his two co-producers, Henry Cline and Danny Tucker, will film a Michigan couple who have eaten at the same Big Boy every day for 30 years.

Another scene will feature the story of a Toledo Big Boy, who was stolen three or four years ago, chopped into little pieces and distributed all around town with a note that read, "Big Boy is dead."

Mr. O'Donnell, a boom operator for many feature films, is himself a Big Boy fan. He bought a 7-foot statue from a collector a few years ago.

"It's too big for my apartment," he says. "It's in a friend's loft. I have visitation rights."

—Mark Currutte

About the Glass Hand

- **Where:** 7650 Harrison Ave., Taylor Creek, 6876 College View
- **Established:** 1990. Cinn. 45324
- **Owner:** Eric Kilb.
- **Number of employees:** Three.
- **Also makes:** Besides Big Boy statues, the company manufactures exterior body parts for mobile health clinics and similar vehicles, pieces for clock and bell displays, machinery covers and prototype models a dozen or two-dozen at a time.
- **Phone:** 353-4777.

er, fiberglass — surgery is Tristate artisan Eric Kilb. He owns the Glass Hand, a fiberglass fabricating company, and works out of a dusty building in a Taylor Creek junkyard.

Mr. Kilb, 37, has had a contract since 1990 with Walnut Hills-based Frisch's Restaurants Inc. (the regional operator of the Big Boy chain) to build and repair Big Boy statues. His is one of only a handful of businesses nationwide that work on the statues. Elias Bros. Big Boy Restaurants Inc. in Warren, Mich., holds worldwide franchising rights to Big Boy.

Since Mr. Kilb has had the Frisch's deal, he has created 20 of the redesigned 8-foot models (double-deck hamburger chest high) and 15 of the 7-foot tall "little guys" (burger on plate, above head), and repaired dozens of previously built Big Boys. He's had his hands on almost all of the 100-some Big Boys at Frisch's restaurants in Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana.

Mr. Kilb goes out of his way to be good to Big Boy — Big Boy now gets covered in the same UV-ray resistant paint as a Toyota Camry — because Big Boy has been very good to him.

Big Boy means a steady stream of work for Mr. Kilb's three-man shop.

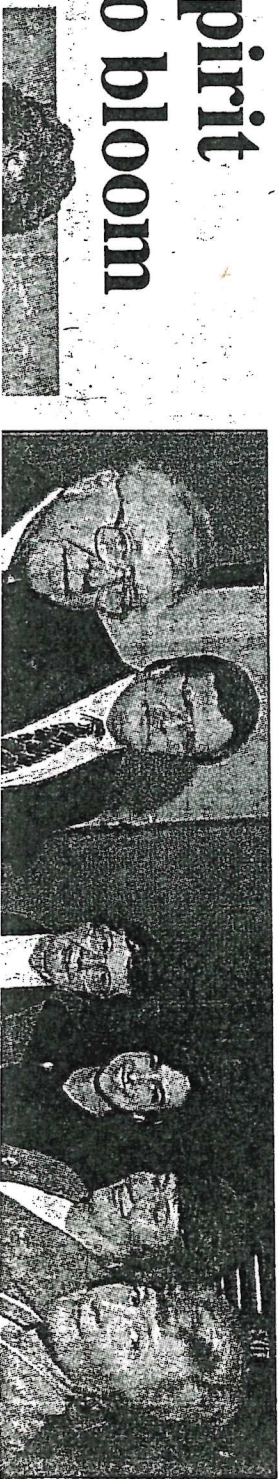
Frisch's was his first job when he opened the Glass Hand in 1990. Big Boy's also been an icebreaker and a walking (well, sort of) advertisement for the business.

"Companies will call and ask, 'What else have you done?' I say, 'Have you ever seen a Big Boy?' Then they know who we are," says Mr. Kilb, who lives in

(Please see BIG BOY, Page D2)

Woman's spirit continues to bloom

As Jane Cramer Patterson lay dying of cancer, her hospital room



Kilb: A hand in Big Boy's good looks

CONTINUED FROM PAGE D1

College Hill with his wife, Cindy, and their son, Forrest, a freshman at Walnut Hills High School. "You can't beat the recognition Big Boy has brought us."

The care and feeding of Big Boys is so time-consuming that Mr. Kilb hired his third employee — a former auto painter — to do nothing but handle them.

"It's a great pick-up line. 'Well, I make Big Boy statues,'" says Rick Ralston Jr., 22, a 1993 East Central (Ind.) High School graduate. "There's not many jobs where so many people see your work."

Since Mr. Ralston joined the Glass Hand two years ago, he and Mr. Kilb have standardized the building and repair of Big Boy.

The new 8-foot Big Boy has 16 pieces, plus a base. The hollow fiberglass guy weighs about 100 pounds. Refurbishing him is a 10-day job for Mr. Ralston. Painting him is a 19-step process that begins with the buns — his, not the hamburger's.

The first three days are spent sanding Big Boy with an air-powered machine. Putting on a greenish-gray primer, which reveals pinholes and other imperfections, requires another two days. An additional two days are used to fill in or repair the damage. The final three days are dedicated to the actual painting and application of a clear-coat finish.

Big Boy's life expectancy has

increased, Mr. Kilb says, because of the auto paint and other production improvements he has made. He'd rather not say how much a Big Boy costs to make.

"Spring is a busy time for Big Boys," he says. "Store managers will walk outside, look at Big Boy and say, 'He looks bad.' They (corporate headquarters) now keep a backlog of three or four so we don't have to work under the gun quite as much."

A paint for the pickles

How recognizable is Big Boy? Mr. Kilb's paint supplier carries "Big Boy Flesh," "Big Boy Red" and "Big Boy Green" — for the pickles.

"I pick up the phone and tell 'em, 'Hey, send me down a quart of 'Big Boy Cheese,'" Mr. Kilb says. "They know exactly what I mean. They've got it matched in their computer."

Mr. Kilb's raw materials are continuous fiberglass strands that come in 50-pound rolls and one-sixteenth-inch thick fiberglass mat that weigh 1½ ounces per square foot.

To create both molds and finished pieces, the strand is fed

through a high-pressure machine called a chopper gun.

The fiberglass strand bonds to a polyester resin, thanks to a liquid catalyst. The material dries to a finish that can be cut with a knife.

Steve McGowan, an original Glass Hand employee, runs the chopper gun. The Covendale man once bought a plastic Big Boy bank from a restaurant, illuminated it and placed it on his truck as a hood ornament.

"Fun stuff," such as Big Boy, accounts for about half of the Glass Hand's business.

Mr. Kilb learned the fiberglass trade working for boat manufacturers here and in Nevada and Arizona.

He also worked for the former Cincinnati-based Taft Attractions and Kings Productions, creating fiberglass Hanna-Barbera cartoon characters — Scooby Doo, Fred Flintstone — for theme parks.

But Big Boy is his signature work.

He has collected almost everything Big Boy and keeps it in his office, which is layered with the white dust of sanded fiberglass.

On the bulletin board, there's a Guess Jeans ad with Big Boy in the

background. Beside it is a *Quigman's* cartoon from 1996.

In the cartoon, Big Boy's sitting in an easy chair in front of his television after a hard day's work. He's still holding the burger and reading the newspaper.

His wife stands at the kitchen doorway and says: *All I'm saying is either you find another job or we pay that thing off the plate and EAT it.*

Big Boy built the business

Big Boy is on the back of Archie Harton Ellison comic book.

One of McDonald's twisted gold, en arches sprouts from Big Boy's head, as it rests among other ruined pieces of Americana in the blue glass desert.

(Mr. Kilb took the name of his business from one of Mr. Ellison's stories, "The Demon with the Glass Hand").

And he has built the Glass Hand on Big Boy.

"You can't sit in a Frisch's parking lot on a weekend and not see three or four kids hug Big Boy in 15 minutes," Mr. Kilb says.

He understands. He feels like hugging him, too.

... don't want to rush into hat I could regret forever same time, there is more than having some-cares for you and for care — it's just not how things would be. ing in a fairy-tale world, a real love out there, there are no doubts? know would probably ve a good relationship stay together. How do over?

CONFUSED HEART
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at P.O. 69440, Los 90069.

... ueen of H in the towel when unhappy contract. fates will provide on to raise to four d — it would have the black-suit versed. Three no been straightfor-

... Had that lost to East's queen, declarer's foresight in partially elim- inating the heart suit would have paid off — East could not have exited safely. The defender could cash two high trumps

... of the hand. Declarer cashed the king of hearts, came to hand with a heart ruff and led a diamond to the ten.

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