

Bicknee Tattoo Supply's Rich T is a fun-loving man who wears many hats decorated by his colorful tattooed past. Rich's love affair with tattooing began long ago and has remained steadfast through his days as a Rock and Roller, tattoo artist, supplier, and a curator of tattoo history. It is difficult to pinpoint at which place Rich T's life shows more passion for tattooing, but this casual sort of fellow

# RICH T'S

has been doing it right for a long time.

Early in life Rich T fell in love with the Rock and Roll and tattoo culture. "I just thought they looked cool," said Rich. "I started getting tattooed right out of high school by guys like Jan Gawronski and Marty Holcomb." But Rock and Roll called and Rich and his friend Ron Young decided to move to NYC to start the rockabilly group, the Kingpins, in 1981.

As a musician running with a rockabilly crowd, Rock and Roll was a constant motivator for Rich. It was while he was on the Lower East Side cutting his teeth in the music scene with the Kingpins that Rich's love of tattoos cemented themselves with the kind of guy he was. Between gigs with his band, Rich found himself getting tattooed by the likes of Bob Roberts and Mike Bakaty. "I couldn't wait for the next Ed Hardy's *TattooTime* to come out," Rich recalled. This was before tattoo magazines—only really hip book stores would have *TattooTime* for the tattoo-savvy types to enjoy.

When the Kingpins went overseas for a tour of

England, Rich was able to get tattooed by one of the true kings of British tattooing, Dennis Cockell, and by Sally Malan. "Actually, he tattooed all the band members. I got a mermaid on the inside of my forearm, and later on in 2000 I was able to buy that very same mermaid flash from his shop," Rich T told S&I. At the time, Rich had no clue how important that history was going to be. Tattooing had permanently marked his heart, and it continued to open doors for him. Post-Kingpins, Rich fronted the band Lower East Side Rockers and was involved with Floor Kiss & Kieth Streng's Full Time Men.

Music eventually took a back seat as Rich's life moved forward and he once again found his desire to be closer to tattooing full force in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1992. At the time, tattooing was illegal in Milwaukee proper and Rich was over 30 years old. Nobody

## STORY OF BICKNEE, T-BUILDS, AND THE OHIO TATTOO MUSEUM

Article and present day photography by Mary D'Aloisio



Rich T. Kingpin  
promo photo 1981

wanted to teach another tattooer—and the passionate young man found it hard to get into a shop to apprentice. Rich's desire met opportunity at the doorstep of Bill Lorenz in Milwaukee's underground tattoo scene.

"The first person to put a tattoo machine in my hand and talk me through it was Bill Lorenz, but everybody was tight-lipped about tattooing. Bill did me a great service. He talked me through my first tattoos, and then he and I worked underground in an apartment," said Rich.

"The internet existed, but most people didn't have it. So, learning then or trying to get information was a different game altogether. At the time I started tattooing in Milwaukee proper, tattooing was illegal. But when Bill and I were working, a beat

cop would come by and smack his baton on the windows if they were open and say "hi." They weren't worried about it."

Eventually, Rich picked up the craft and his aptitude for it attracted the likes of Scott Friedrich who had two shops near Milwaukee—one in Menomonee Falls and one in Sheboygan. Friedrich was the first one to officially set out to teach Rich T about the business, and he molded Rich T into the tattooer he is today.

"I really cut my teeth tattooing there. It was a classic tattoo shop in Sheboygan. We were tattooing next to an exotic-dancer bar on the wrong side of the tracks. It was everything a tattoo shop should be, and it was busy," recalled Rich.

Rich T was working for Friedrich when fate called him back home to the southern Ohio river town of Gallipolis, where he had grown up. "I gave my required notice when I put down a deposit on a little shop (Temple Tattoo) in Gallipolis. I had planned to find a paying gig working weekends near a base at a nearby military town because I thought there was no way I could make it down there in rural Ohio. As soon as I moved and opened up, it became clear that I

Fineline NYC 1984

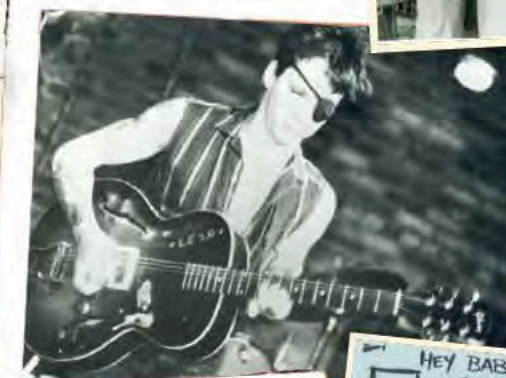


Above: Kingpins  
promo photo 1982.  
BTW, that's Ron  
Young of Little  
Caesar fame on the  
far right!

Left: LESR 1984  
Bitter end.

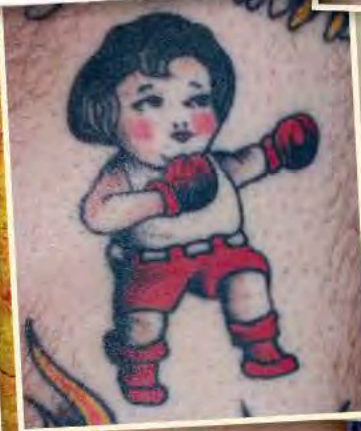
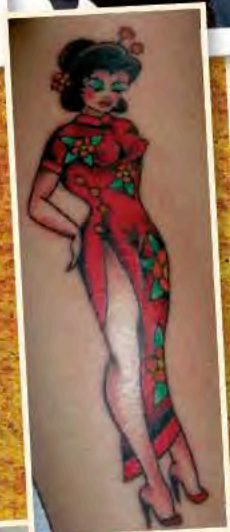
Bottom left: LESR  
CBGB 1984.

Bottom: Floor Kiss  
CBGB flyer.





Rich T. tattooing.



Rich T.'s first professional tattoo. Rose done by Jan Gawronski 1980.

was going to be fine. There was plenty of work. By my second year, I was looking for help," said Rich.

With his tattoo shop working well, Rich started to flex his wings in the tattooed community. It was while filling-in for the Mardi Gras weekend in Galveston, TX and working long, crazy hours that Rich had a meeting with destiny.

"There was this guy Bics, and we became friendly. Mickey Bee machines were very hard to get in the States then and I had one that I just loved. We were trying to buy a load of machines and we couldn't—it just wasn't happening. So we decided to try to make our own machines. We made kind of like a T-dial-esque machine. I



proper supply business off the ground. Rich became an authority for his custom-built tattoo machines and Bicknee Tattoo Supply became the kind of professional, yet mom and pop and one-stop-shop, that it is today.

Bicknee Tattoo Supply has



Rich T.'s T-Solid Machine



evolved over the years and boasts a huge catalog of mostly American-made tattoo machines, books, and supplies. "Much of what we sell we manufacture in-house—machines coils, clip cords, etc.," Rich told S&I as he was winding the copper wire around a core. "I try to be the supply company I would have liked to have had. I've always tried to carry stuff that people would like to have and provide them with good service."

"I'd like to spend my money close to home, to support our neighbors. It's that kind of simple stuff. We stay on top of the

don't know how many we made, maybe 30. We had a local machinist make some parts and we welded them up and put 'em together. We thought that it would take us six months to sell them, but they were gone like that. He and I would kind of 'wheel and deal' and take each other bits that were hard to get wherever we were. I wheeled and dealt stuff like Lionel Titchener machines that I brought back from visits with Bics in England. They were neat, and tattooers would buy them. So, we decided to set up a proper supply company."

The two set out together, but parted ways early on, with Rich buying out his buddy and he and his wife Bobbi putting in the long hours and money that it took to get a



L-R Bruce Henson, Bobbi T., Rich T. & Jake Kennedy





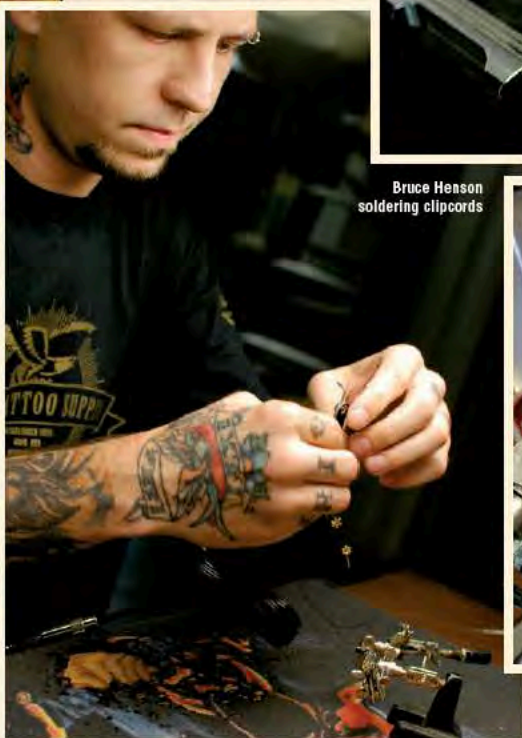
loyalty, and experience that led Rich T to pursue his love of tattoo history.

"By accident, I started collecting in the mid- to late-1990s. I've just always been charmed by it. I started collecting tattoo stuff more seriously after I'd owned a couple of tattoo shops and had more than a couple dimes to rub together. If I saw a nice sheet of flash, I'd snatch it up and hang it in the house," said Rich.

"Then I got my first computer in 1998 and when I saw what turned out to be an Al Cooke collection on eBay—I snapped that up quickly. They had pieces up, but when I got there to pick up, I negotiated to buy the whole collection. I bought everything they had."

quality. The iron for our T-solid machines is from a foundry in Dayton, Ohio. Even our connectors for our clip cords are made in Michigan. Our wire is American-made and I buy it through a local distributor who's right across town," he added.

Perhaps it's that same kind of eye for detail, passion for tattooing,



Bruce Henson soldering clipcords



odd Wagner and Picaro machines, Bristol Tattoo Club photographs, historic flash, and miscellaneous but tale-

The assortment of tattoo history gathered by Cooke was extensive. Some pieces dated back to the turn of the century and spanned the globe, and the collection was a nice start to Rich's Ohio Tattoo Museum. Soon after, Rich was acquiring most of the contents of the Schiefley Shop and a strong lode of Stoney St. Clair material. With those three major collections, all of the



Possible Coleman Flash from the Al Cooke Collection.



Joe Diamond Rivers Flash from the Al Schiefley collection



Percy Waters travel kit from the Al Schiefley collection



Al Schiefley passport photo & travel documents 1955

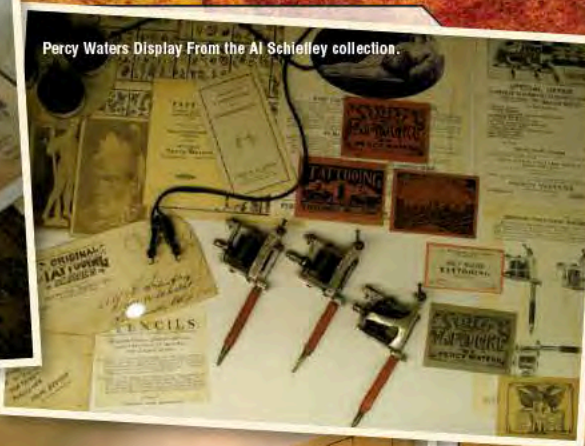


Flash from the Al Cooke collection

Schiefley letters from the 1930s



Percy Waters Display From the Al Schiefley collection.



Charlie Wagner supply price-list 1920s.



Bristol Tattoo Club Trophy Cup given to Al Schiefley 1956



Charlie Wagner machine.



S&W Tattoo Supply battery operated tattoo machines (Stanley & Walter Moskowitz)



Bob Wicks 1930.



Rich & Bobbi T.



telling equipment, Rich was able to paint a nostalgic picture. The Ohio Tattoo Museum is a unique look into the past and passions of this ancient craft, and Rich T's love of the craft is preserving it in its entire splendor. Since the museum's humble beginnings, many tattooers have made donations of tattoo-related antiquities.

Rich T's collection has grown quite a bit since the days the collection was in the back his tattoo shop. The Ohio Tattoo Museum will be moving from its current location (along with Bicknee Tattoo Supply) to a new 7500 square foot beautiful storefront in Bidwell, Ohio, and a grand-opening is planned for early 2014.

Rich continues to give back to the community and the craft that has meant so much to him over the years. "How can I not? Everything I have is because of tattooing."