

Rural Business Is Based On Rocks

You might say that the Eyben family business has a rock solid foundation. Blair and Denise Eyben of Kitscoty, Alta., operate Prairie Stoneworks and make their living by carving and etching stones of all sizes and shapes.

Their finished products include garden centerpieces, gate markers, memorials, grave monuments, and smaller items such as Italian marble coasters, candle holders, wall hangings and plaques.

With some help from their youngsters, Shane and Samantha, the couple specializes in personalized rock creations that leave a lasting record or tribute to the people, animals or things their clients hold dear.

"Some people keep memories alive by having us carve a record of an important date, their family name, land location, or whatever is significant to them. These

memory stones give a sense of permanency – that those memories will never be forgotten, even after the owners are gone," Denise says. "We've also done pet stones that recognize special animals that have passed away."

Eybens' market their gift line at craft shows and gift stores around Alberta and across Canada.

Another of their products that have become popular are "inukshuk kits." Inukshuks originate in the north where Inuit people erected them as sentinals to travelers. Eybens provide a collection of slab-shaped rocks, and customers across the country assemble these kits to their own liking.

Their custom orders sometimes take them to the clients' property where they will work on stones that are too large to transport. Otherwise, their customers either bring their own special rocks to the Prairie Stoneworks shop,



The Eybens sandblast designs to rocks and will also paint or add text as requested.

or they choose one from Eybens' supply. These are usually gathered from stone quarries in various locations, and local farmers' fieldstones.

Once they've cleaned a rock, they make stencils and sandblast the design. Lastly, the text or pictures are usually painted so they will be more eye-catching.

Prices vary depending on the project (some

of the gift item prices are available on their website) and the Eybens welcome specific inquiries.

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"We can produce a boulder of whatever weight, size, shape or color you want," says Eldean Bergman. "Boulders can be built off site and delivered or built on site to an unlimited size."

Custom-Built Boulders Promote Farms, Businesses

Putting a business or farm name on the side of a rock or boulder is a neat way to promote a business or just mark your farm. But finding the right rock and doing the work on it can be time-consuming and expensive. That's why an Illinois company called Boulder Designs has come up with a way to make its own boulders from scratch.

"Our process can produce a boulder of whatever weight, size, shape and color you want," says Eldean Bergman, president. "Boulders can be built off site and delivered or built on site to an unlimited size."

Bergman's boulder process uses a similar concrete and additive mix as currently used for the company's quick-setting in-ground curbs and borders, called Border Magic. Additional additives are used to strengthen the boulders and to prevent water penetration.

Initially, the boulder building process is being offered to existing Border Magic franchise holders. Eventually, Boulder Design will be offered as a separate franchise.

Bergman explains that the cost of a custom-built boulder depends on its size and the type of imprint. Special imprints, such as trademarks or other graphics, are more expensive than simple letters and numbers.

"We do a lot of stones that people set by



Boulder-building process uses concrete and additional additives that strengthen and prevent water penetration.

a mailbox or at the end of a driveway and they might cost as little as \$125," he says. "But we also recently built and delivered a 2,100-lb. boulder with custom imprints that cost \$1,280."

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Rock Artwork Grew Into Profitable Business

Lin Wellford of Green Forest, Ark. turns common rocks into animals.

Wellford has made a very successful business for herself by using her artistic talent to make unique creations, using rocks as her canvas. Besides animals, she paints buildings, flowers, and almost anything else she can visualize.

Upon realizing the popularity of her inexpensive, three-dimensional art, she also began publishing a series of popular books that teach others how to become rock artists.

"Since I began this in 1978, many others have also found enjoyment and profit from this type of painting," she says. "It's not just a quirky hobby, but a recognized art form. It's perfect for stay-at-home moms, people who travel, and retired folks. Actually, this is probably the oldest art form on the planet when you consider that early man used to paint on cave walls."

Wellford says that any smooth rock works to paint on. She uses acrylic paints to create lifelike cats, rabbits, fawns, snakes, turtles, raccoons, owls, leopards, mice, pandas, walrus, squirrels, foxes, and almost anything else you can imagine.

Wellford has also painted "rock buildings" such as barns, farmhouses, cottages, shops, Victorian homes and churches. These creations are best suited to square or rectangular rocks with rough edges such as fieldstones, she says. Wellford has used the various buildings to create entire villages.

"Rocks are also suitable for painting flowers," she says, noting that she arranges the flower rocks in baskets or vases.

Since every rock is unique, no two paintings are exactly alike either. She finishes her work with a protective acrylic seal and prices them by weight. Painted rocks weighing 1 to 3 lbs. cost \$25 to \$29 each.

"My most popular pieces have been cats and kittens. Round, smooth rocks are well-suited to a curled up cat, a slightly lumpy one works well for a cat with kittens, and an oblong rock makes a good upright or reclining cat," she says. "Finding the right rock is like a treasure hunt. I often get mine from the creek banks, fields and roadside ditches near my home."

Because her rock painting knowledge is in such high demand, Wellford has little time anymore for painting, however. She has pub-



Lin Wellford paints flowers on rocks and arranges them in baskets or vases. Painted rocks weighing 1 to 3 lbs. cost \$25 to \$29 each.

lished seven how-to books (with North Light Books) and in all, has sold more than 855,000 copies.

She's currently working on a new book that should be out in the spring. Published by ArtStone Press, "Rock Painting Fun for Everyone" includes a cross-section of project subjects.

She has also produced a video that shows the step-by-step painting process and has taped a number of television segments. Wellford's website offers links to fellow rock artists who sell their creations and do commissioned orders.

"Every time someone tells me they've been able to bring in an income for their family while staying at home to paint rocks, it's the best reward I could have," she says.

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