

Country Store No Barrier To Building A Business

Buggy Barn Quilts is a successful business with a national customer base and a gravel driveway. It's located "out in the country" in eastern Washington. But even though it's nearly 25 miles from the nearest large population center, the business – housed in a former buggy barn – brings in customers every day. And once a year, it brings in big crowds.

It wasn't always that way, admits Pam Soliday, who with her sister/partner Janet Nesbitt started the business more than 15 years ago.

"When we opened our business, it didn't take us long to realize we weren't going to survive on our town of 300 people," says Soliday. "We knew we would have to draw from Spokane, but there were tons of great quilt shops there already."

Soliday and Nesbitt got creative to promote the business and to get customers to make the drive to Nesbitt's farmstead.

The sisters started writing books on quilting. Not only did the books bring in income, but with names like "A Little Bit Crazy" and "Around the Bend", they helped spread the word about the business. Using Nesbitt's drafting skills from her former career as a civil engineer, they began making quilting patterns of their own and selling them.

At the end of their first year in business, they celebrated by holding a customer appreciation day. The buggy barn featured a display of 20 quilts the two had made.

Over the past 15 years, the event has morphed into the annual Outdoor Quilt Show & Folk Art Sale. Held each year on the last weekend of August, this past year's show featured more than 200 quilts covering every available surface, including the barn.

"Gradually the show became more and more about customer quilts, so that now it's all customer quilts. There is no judging or prizes, just sharing the craft," says Soliday. "The craft sale is filled with locally-made items. We also hold classes, though they have grown too large to hold on the farm."

In recent years, the sisters added parts of a second barn for classrooms, as well as shipping and handling space. Other things have grown as well. The sisters now have 20 books with their own designs, patterns and their own line of fabric. A shop on the farm is filled with quilts, bundles of fabric scraps for making quilts, other books on quilting, kits and other related craft materials.

The sisters also maintain a website with all those things and more for sale. A few years ago Buggy Barn Quilts was named the top quilting shop by American Quilting Magazine. Soliday says it's still the only top shop located on a gravel road.



Photo courtesy Bruce Andre Photography, Inc.

Based in a rural area of eastern Washington, Buggy Barn Quilts is a successful business with a national customer base.

She recalls when they first opened, and men would drive their wives over from Spokane on cold, dark winter afternoons. "They would ask, 'How do you ever expect to get any business out here?'" she recounts. "We wanted to say, 'You're here, aren't you?' But we didn't."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, The Buggy Barn, 28848 Tramm Rd. N., Reardan, Wash. 99029 (ph 509 796-2188; toll free 877 339-0281; www.buggybarnquilts.com).



The business is housed in a former buggy barn and features a display of 20 quilts.

Variety Makes Bekkum's Butter Better

"We're famous for our summer butter. It makes a big difference when cows hit the green grass. People go crazy for it," says Al Bekkum, owner and operator of Nordic Creamery based at his wife's family farm in Westby, Wis.

Besides letting nature – and good pasture – flavor his butter, he's come up with a few delicious concoctions of his own. His cinnamon-sugar, garlic and basil, and maple syrup flavored butters will soon be joined by new flavors: crushed red pepper and chocolate butters. In addition, more customers are discovering his Spesiell Kremen Butter, a cultured butter that starts with incubated cream, and has a wonderful smell and amazing taste.

Bekkum has been making butter for more than 20 years, since he started at a creamery as a winter job to supplement his construction work income. He never left, and he earned licenses in both cheese-making and butter-making. He now sells varieties of cheese and butter at his on-farm store, at farmers markets, and through distributors and his online store.

"The butter is more interesting to me. I've got more of a passion for butter," Bekkum explains. "Not a lot of people are doing anything interesting with butter. It all tastes the same, with no variety to it. People are looking for different tastes, a different look."

"We have a huge following in Chicago," he adds. "People love to know where their product is coming from, and they like to support smaller producers."

Prices for Nordic Creamery butter start at \$2.55/8 oz., retail. Online orders are shipped via UPS or FedEx. During the summer, butter is often shipped frozen because freezing doesn't affect butter's



Al Bekkum is owner and operator of Nordic Creamery, which is based at his wife's family farm near Westby, Wis.



The creamery sells a wide variety of different-flavored cheeses and butters.

flavor or texture. For longer distances butter is sometimes shipped with ice packs.

Bekkum says good butter starts with good fresh cream. He buys cream from four or five sources and will also have some from his own herd starting this year.

The award-winning Nordic Creamery produces a few thousand pounds of butter per week in addition to a variety of cheeses from goat and cow's milk.

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"All my business comes to me by word of mouth," says Kathy Peet, who builds quality saddles for working cowboys.



Saddlemaker Enjoys Her Trade

By Sylvia MacBean

Kathy Peet, of Oxbow, Sask., builds saddles for working cowboys who use them on the job and for rodeos. They're made so well that many plan to pass them down to their children and grandchildren for generations to come.

"I got into the business at age 19 when I got a job in a well-known saddle shop. I did the stamping, carving, tooling and assembling of parts. I learned all the basics but it was years before I started building trees (the base of a saddle)."

Peet has transformed her garage into a workshop.

"It's a job that a lot of women don't do because it's physical and you have to be fairly strong. I have found other ways to do things because I don't have the physical strength that men do. But, I can do most of it without a problem."

"I have always liked horses and had a pony since I was two year old. I don't think it would be easy to be a saddle maker if you didn't ride. You wouldn't know anything about comfort for you and for horses," she says.

All of the saddles Peet and her family use on their farm are saddles Peet has made. "I like saddle making because I have kids. It was

good to be able to stay home. So, I have always had a shop in my house or in my garage. It's really handy because my kids can come and go. This isn't a big money maker, but it's a good second income," she explained. "What I really like about it is that it's nice to build our own tack. We would never have the tack we have if we had to go buy it," she says.

Peet now makes saddles, chaps, all the tack, bridles, breast collars, and whatever people want. She also makes detailed repairs to old saddles.

"I don't advertise," says Peet. "All my business comes to me by word of mouth. When I get too old to make saddles, I hope to focus on silversmithing and braiding, all that easier stuff."

"When summer comes I want to be out riding. So, I ask people to bring their saddles and items for repair in the winter," Peet says.

She also teaches classes in leatherwork for 4-H clubs and anyone interested in learning the craft.

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