



Small Business Week: Manufacturers, craftsmen are part of county's economic engine

By Colleen Jones
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Ascending the stairs to Moonshine Wood & Steel's workshop on Riberia Street, you smell the sawdust before you can even see it.

Inside, David Woodside is working on a project — and only that project — as each of the unique custom pieces being built commands the full attention of Woodside and his partner, Jesse LaPrees.

The two men learned the trade through their fathers and found they had enough in common in their approach to craftsmanship to combine forces five years ago and launch a business. Working with woods like cypress and walnut, and forging metal hardware, the pair creates modern, industrial and rustic furniture, wall installations and other objects — unique displays that often become conversation pieces, which accounts for why so much of Moonshine's business is through word-of-mouth.

"People are looking for a certain thing size-wise and style-wise that they can't find anywhere," Woodside said.

Woodside and LaPress will work with residential clients to craft sliding barn doors for the home one day and commercial clients the next, such as Nettles Fine Jewelry where they recently redid the showroom in a farmhouse-chic look for the counters and barstools.

The business has done well enough that they could quit their day jobs, Woodside said.

LaPrees' secret to success: "Stay small and focus on meaningful work."

With today kicking off national Small Business Week, The Record took a look at just a few of the smaller manufacturing and design studios that are helping the local economy hum along.

Marge Cirillo, who leads the St. Johns County Small Business Development Center, said these are also the kind of ventures that help contribute to the character of St. Johns County.

“Many of our small businesses offer unique and personalized products and services which the big box stores don’t have. ... Our small businesses bring growth and innovation to the fabric of the community,” Cirillo said.

Urban Asado was an entrepreneurial jump that’s worked out well for the husband-and-wife team of Nicke and Christie Carrera who create Argentinian-style, wood-burning grills. They have shipped the hand-welded grills to clients all over the globe from their Riberia Street warehouse on the river.

It’s the simple, timeless nature of his craft that’s kept Dan Holiday in the leather-making business for 60 years. Starting out as an assistant in a shoe repair shop on St. George Street, Holiday eventually moved his shop to Aviles Street.

Now 83, the leather crafter said that quality construction and being an honest businessman have served him well all these says.

“A lot of Europeans will come visit [St. Augustine] and want to bring back something made in America. They’ll say, ‘Did you make that belt?’ And I’ll say, ‘Yes, look at me now,’” Holiday said, referring to how he is usually working on some creation while they’re in the shop.

He’s also proud of having supported other fledgling artisans by leasing them space in his same building, which now includes dozens of tenants.

“It’s a collage of different people. Customers just love to see somebody making something right in front of them,” Holiday said.

Yield Work Shop, on the other hand, is much newer to St. Augustine’s business scene. The shop that opened in October 2018 on Cordova Street is a showroom for the product line designed by Rachel Grant and Andrew Deming. Yield was first established in 2012 in San Francisco where Grant and Deming met at the California College of the Arts, according to the biography featured on their website.

The studio is featured in the most recent publication of Bon Appétit, with the author noting their small-batch but broad catalogue of products, from the sleek, clean lines of a reimagined French press to a minimalist glass dining table.

The couple describes their approach to design this way: “From our home goods to our 3D-printed gold cast rings, every product and venture we undertake is a marriage of technology and hand craft.”