

BUSINESS



Brand maker

Former investigator finds second career shaping metal to meet demand

By ANIESA HOLMES

Daily News Staff

WHEN IT COMES to home décor, metal artisan Stephen Zawistowski believes that every customer should get exactly what they want.

“There’s too much routine stuff, and we need to have something unique in our lives and that’s what I’m trying to do,” he said. “Some people come to you with ideas and I’m like, ‘Wow I’ve never thought of that before.’ But I’m willing to try anything once.”

Zawistowski started his Stephen Z Metal Designs business five years ago. The Jacksonville resident enjoys twisting and turning pieces of steel into custom furniture, gates and fencing, military memorabilia and more.

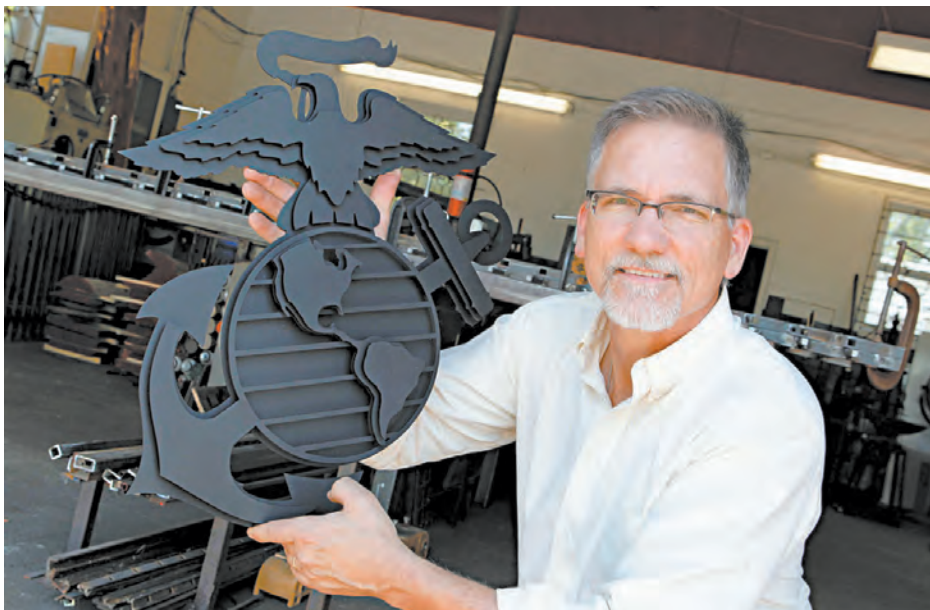
“Too much of what we buy these days is manufactured in a factory in China somewhere,” he said. “There were 1,000 of them made and you’ve got one of them and people

just have to settle for what’s out there. I said that I need to provide a service to give people exactly what they want.”

Zawistowski decided to start his business after retiring after 30 years as an agent for the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation. The career change was dramatic, but reflected a talent that was passed down through his family. The son of a Marine, Zawistowski said he always enjoyed learning craftsman techniques from his father.

“Our family has always been people who prepared their own stuff ... My dad was real handy so I’ve always been taking things apart,” he said. “I remember having one of those pedal cars and getting it all apart in the garage and then asking my dad to show me how to put it back together.”

Zawistowski decided to take his skills a step further when he bought a \$25 welder at a yard sale 10 years ago and began to practice in his front yard. Zawistowski said that he knew his welding skills



Photos by Don Bryan/The Daily News

Stephen Zawistowski, owner of Stephen Z Metal Designs Inc., molds steel into a variety of items including furniture, gates, rails, military themed artwork and more. Stephen uses a grinding tool to finish the tops of pickets for a fence at his shop outside of Jacksonville.

were improving when he got a nod of approval from his wife Claire, a music and drama teacher.

“After a while I built something and my wife allowed it to go in the house; nothing else had been allowed to go in the house before,” Zawistowski said. “It was a side table in the dining room and it was kind of abstract. Soon people began seeing stuff and wanting to buy it so I said, ‘Hey it’s time to do this full time.’”

Much of Zawistowski’s work is indeed abstract. He uses traditional and modern welding techniques to heat and mold metal to create his sig-

nature plant vine style for side tables, lamps and home decorations. His most popular item is a wine table that will hold up to four bottles of wine with pieces of metal intertwined around the legs. He has also transitioned into outdoor architectural rails, fencing and gates for homes. When friend Whitney Jezek-Power saw one of his creations several years ago, she knew that Zawistowski had the skill to produce a special military themed gift for her husband Paul’s homecoming.

“I was asked three years ago

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Don Bryan / The Daily News

Zawistowski works on a picket fence he's creating as part of his Z Metal Designs business.

to build a model CH-53 because (her) husband was coming home from Afghanistan and she wanted to have this for the outside of the house," he said. "It has a 3-D feel, and the whole thing was about five inches thick when it was all done."

Since then Zawistowski designs three-dimensional replicas of military vehicles and aircraft and has even branched out to branding irons, which have become a hit among guests at the annual Hidden Talents Craft Fair aboard Camp Lejeune.

"By the time you're ready to grill your steak you can brand the Marine Corps logo on it," he said.

Zawistowski has also donated items to raise money for the Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund. Jezek-Power, who is also a volunteer community relations worker and grant writer for the Semper Fi Fund, said that his contri-

butions have given the organization a boost in its fundraising efforts.

"He donated one last year and we raised almost \$500 with his piece, and he's donating another one this year," Jezek-Power said. "All that I have to do is pick up the phone and he will say, 'Whatever you want, Whitney.'"

One of his most exciting projects, he said, was when he was asked to create an eagle, globe and anchor insignia for former Marine Corps Commandant Gen. James Conway when he visited Camp Lejeune several years ago.

"I was told that Gen. Conway loved it. I was thrilled about the opportunity to do something for the commandant for the Marine Corps," Zawistowski said. "If something that I made reminds him of his service in the Marine Corps, that's great

for me. It's an opportunity to say thank you to guys who have sacrificed a lot."

Zawistowski said the greatest reward of his work is going inside the minds of his clients and producing unique items for their homes that will keep visitors intrigued and entertained.

"We live in such an industrial world that the idea that someone is going to sit down and listen to you talk about a product and what you want to have is a pretty foreign concept now," Zawistowski said. "I'm trying to change that."

For more information, visit stephenzmetaldesigns.com. To contact him, call 910-346-2917 or email steve@stephenzmetaldesigns.com.

Contact Aniesa Holmes at 910-219-8473 or aholmes@freedomenc.com. Visit jdnews.com to comment.

Business Briefs



Hardee's program helps military

An extra buck when you buy that Thickburger can help military families and veterans.

Donate \$1 through May 23 at Hardee's to its "Stars for Troops" program and receive \$10 worth of restaurant coupons in return, according to a Hardee's press release. Those who donate will also receive a commemorative "Stars for Troops" cut-out to personalize and place on display in the restaurant.

Funds raised through Stars for Troops will support both local and national programs of Homes for Our Troops and USA Cares, according to the release.

Realtors receive national recognition

Three Realtors with Prudential Hometown in Jacksonville have been recognized by Prudential Real Estate and Relocation Services, a Prudential Financial company.



Christina Garrett has been named to the Chairman's Circle-Gold, which is awarded to the top 2 percent of the Network's approximately 54,100 sales professionals based on gross commission income or closed units.

Shanon Civils has been named to the President's Circle for 2010. The award recognizes the network's top 3 percent of residential sales professionals who exemplified great sales measures in closed residential GCI, commercial GCI or closed 50

residential units for the year. Al Wagner has been named to the Leading Edge Society for 2010. The award recognizes residential sales professionals with great sales measures in closed residential GCI, commercial GCI or closed 35 residential units for the year.

Allstate owner awarded Honor Ring

The owner of a Jacksonville Allstate agency has been recognized by the company for high standards in customer satisfaction, customer retention and profitable business growth, according to an Allstate press release.

Allstate Insurance Company awarded Mark Bailey with the company's Honor Ring. The Mark Bailey Agency is now one of the top Allstate agencies in the nation in auto, property, commercial, power sports insurance and financial services sales, according to the release.

Contact the Mark Bailey Agency at 910-346-5433 or MarkBailey@allstate.com.

SECU offers discounts for theme attractions

A 10-year tradition continues at a local credit union just in time for summer.

All State Employees' Credit Union branches in partnership with the State Employees Association of North Carolina will offer discount theme park tickets.

Through the end of September, SECU and SEANC members can visit any of SECU's 236 branches and purchase discount tickets to attractions including Carowinds, Kings Dominion, Busch Gardens, Myrtle Waves, NASCAR Speedpark and Pavilion Nostalgia Park in Myrtle Beach.

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