



The Bee

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Wales Center couple make statement with custom, made in America artwork

by PAUL OLCZAK
Editor

Just one look at the walls of Rob and Sandy Starbird's home on Hunters Creek Road in Wales Center will reveal all you need to know about their love of creating artwork out of metal.

The walls of their home are lined with custom pieces made by hand. The process of making each one involves the use of a computer, a plasma table-top cutter, and an oven for baking the powder coatings used to finish each piece.

Rob Starbird was employed by Northrop Grumman for many years but in 2009 was laid off.

"I kind of knew it was coming," he said. "For the last few years I was there, I was basically training my replacements."

Along with their residence on Hunters Creek, the property contains a barn, which had nothing inside when the couple purchased the land. Slowly but surely, Rob Starbird turned it into a work station where he can weld, use a blow torch, and bake pieces in an oven.

Starbird Concepts had been born when the Starbirds were living in southern California. As Sandy Starbird explained, the couple first decided to show off their artwork at local craft shows.

"Our 'wow factor' is huge at craft shows," she said, adding that this is mostly due to the original designs that characterize each piece.

"If you go to Pier 1 Imports or a place like that, you'll end up with the same piece as 30 other

people," she said. "We bring our own flair to each piece."

"That [after the first craft show] was when I said to Sandy, 'Hey, we can do this,'" said Rob Starbird.

Sandy Starbird also has business experience from her days as a manager for Avis Rent-A-Car. She said that this, combined with her husband's artistic and computer talents, make for a good combination.

"It's a nice mesh," he added.

The Starbirds create all kinds of custom art pieces. As an example, Sandy Starbird told a story involving the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

"There was a young girl who was unfortunately confined to a hospital bed after having a bone marrow transplant," she said. "She wanted a piece she could hang in her hospital room that stated it was her 'girl cave.' We made it happen."

Sandy Starbird thinks that the success of the business comes from people's desire for art that serves a purpose. The couple can create everything from candle holders, to coat racks, to lawn decor.

The Starbirds have only one requirement for each piece: everything involved must be made completely in the United States. "All the metal we use is from General Welding & Fabricating in Elma," said Rob Starbird. "After the first few times, they know enough now to only order us American-made metal no matter what."

In fact, much of the artwork created by the Starbirds can be found at local businesses such as



Sandy and Rob Starbird stand in front of some of their artwork. Each piece is custom-made and uses only American-made parts. The Starbirds began their home-based business, Starbird Concepts, in 2009.

the Made in America store in Elma and Gifts of Faith in East Aurora.

Despite the rather tedious process of creating each piece, Sandy Starbird said the praise they receive from customers makes it all worthwhile.

"It's also nice being your own boss, of course," added her husband.

He also spoke of the contrast between what he used to do and

what he does now.

"When I worked at Northrop, I was a software writer," he said.

"Software, of course, becomes obsolete after a while. It's very nice to see something that I created last for a long period of time."

The Starbirds' next craft show will be the Kenan Arts Council's annual holiday gift show from Nov. 18 through 20. The Kenan

Center is located at 433 Locust

St., Lockport.

The Starbirds conduct home tours by appointment. Anyone wanting to see their artwork can call 462-6609. People can also check out their website at www.starbirdconcepts.com. The couple also have a Facebook page. Enter "Starbird Concepts" in the search field at the top of the page.

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