

BUSINESS

9 TO 5

The Journal welcomes ideas for stories about people in our community who are starting a business or changing an old one.

Call the Journal at 285-7411

Getting creative with cabinets

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

Most people who come up with unique inventions are credited with thinking outside the box. One Big Falls man came up with a novel idea by focusing on the box's corners.

Pete Mai, owner of Old School Cabinets in Big Falls, came up with a corner cabinet solution over Labor Day weekend in 2009. He's been a full-time cabinetmaker since 1982, and been working in Koochiching county since 1991, he said. He was working at the North Dakota state fair, and he said all he heard about corner cabinets was complaints.

"People were complaining about the options," he said. "Drawers took up too much space, and the lazy susan didn't work well. So, I tried to combine them."

Mai combined the functionality of the lazy susan with the space-saving benefits of drawers, and came up with the Kornerking. The Kornerking is a corner cabinet unit with drawers, but also spins and has storage on its sides. The line now has 40 items, he said, with different modifications and a retrofit version that can be installed in existing cabinets.

From the first clients he



Old School Cabinets owner Pete Mai shows how his invention, the Kornerking, works.

showed the Kornerking to, the reviews have been nothing but positive, he said. Amy Haman lives south of Rugby, North Dakota, and she said she's had a Kornerking since July, and she loves it.

"I have one for the upper and lower cabinets," she said. "It's so handy, I can get at it from standing, and I don't need a ladder."

The Kornerking hasn't just spread to North Dakota, Mai said. They've shipped units "to every state in the union," as well as tropical locales like the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Internet has helped spread the word about the Kornerking, he said.

"People have found us on the Internet by and large," he said. "Online forums are good too, people are talking about us on there."

Even though the Kornerking has spread through the Internet, Mai said he thinks they could've done better with the product before the Internet.

"Back then trade shows made more sense because attendance was better," he said. "There was a different method of marketing."

People can also find out about the Kornerking from their cabinetmaker, Mai said. There are about 200 active Kornerking dealers, he said. The other



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

The staff at Old School Cabinets consists of Pete Mai, right, his wife Shelley, center, and his son Tony.

cabinetmakers order units as needed, and it usually takes two weeks for delivery of a unit.

The Kornerking has changed the operations of Old School Cabinets, Mai said. In 2009, they did 70 kitchens. Now they're down to 20-25 kitchens a year, because of economics and the Kornerking, he said. Right now, the size of the company is what's keeping Mai from moving to full-time Kornerking production.

"It would be nice to get to

where we needed another eight to ten people and grow from there, then we could put money into marketing," Mai said. "To spend money on marketing would be good, but you have to be able to handle the business when it comes in."

Mai's invention is patent pending, and the only reason he hasn't fully patented it is because he "didn't want to spend my life in court defending it," he said. Again, the size of his operation is one of the factors keeping

his from expanding his idea any more.

"We can't begin to service the entire market," he said. "We can grow some, but the numbers are too big for us to think of doing it in my lifetime."

The future of the Kornerking is expanding the product line, as well as production, Mai said. They've added a spice rack for wall cabinets, and he said "Adding additional products above the Kornerking becomes a definite option for us."

Expanding businesses lead to new jobs

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development reported businesses announced plans in the second quarter to create almost 1,500 jobs related to 39 expansion projects.

Between first and second quarter expansions, the state has seen 81 business expansions in 2013. A sign of economic prosperity is expansion by existing businesses, DEED Commissioner Katie Clark Sieben said.

"One key indicator of economic success is the number of businesses we see expanding within our borders," she said. "The number of companies choosing to invest here represents a level of confidence in the economic opportunities we are seeing statewide."

Manufacturing, which accounts for one out of nine jobs in the state, led all sectors

with 19 expansion projects in the quarter. The food and beverage sector also saw several expansions, including a brewer, orange juice processor and two potato-chip producers.

The Twin Cities had the most expansions with 16, although several other communities also reported major projects. Jackson, in southwest Minnesota, announced three expansion projects, including AGCO, a tractor manufacturer that plans to add 75 jobs by 2015.

Most of the expansions will occur at existing Minnesota companies, but a few are newcomers. Way Better Snacks is relocating from Long Island, N.Y., to Minneapolis, with plans to hire 20 employees. Capital Safety Group, which specializes in fall-protection equipment, plans to add 100 jobs in Red Wing after moving its headquarters from London last year.

IDL closes doors, makes changes

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

Those going to International Discount Liquor looking for beer next week may be surprised to find construction instead. IDL is changing from a liquor store to a secondhand merchandise store.

The decision to change business models wasn't much of a decision, owner Phil Paulbeck said. Because of the new County Market liquor store across the street, he said he couldn't compete.

"At the point that the city council granted them that license, it sort of put me in a position where I had to either put

a good face on it and do my best, or, I'll call it, choose among poor options," he said.

Though he has had to adapt and change his business, he said he doesn't hold any hard feelings towards County Market liquor, as change is the nature of business.

"I understand it, I've been in retail my whole life, and I've watched the evolution from very simple retail to what's growing so complex it's almost out of realm of an individual proprietor," he said.

This changing retail landscape led Paulbeck to the idea of a secondhand merchandise store, in the mode of a

consignment shop, but with a buy, sell, and trade aspect, he said.

"I see a need in this community for people that want to upgrade their appliances, or their furniture, or they need to leave town, or their parents, grandparents are moving into assisted living, and their possessions have to go somewhere," he said.

A website, as well as an openness to trade in anything, will help him fill a need, Paulbeck said. Construction materials, equipment, clothing, household goods, cars, trucks, and trailers are just a few of the things he will be dealing in.

"I'll acquire merchan-

dise to resell and I will sell for others," he said. "I will rent space where people can sell their own and display it and I'll have online listings that will include pictures and descriptions."

As for his existing merchandise, Paulbeck said he's made an agreement to sell his remaining inventory to County Market Liquor.

While at first glance, Menards and County Market may not seem like competitors, but the neighbors may soon find themselves competing over similar interests, Paulbeck said.

"The hardware stores are selling food, and food stores are selling hardware."

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I'M FREE

*Don't grieve for me, for now I'm Free
I'm following the path God laid you see
I took His Hand when I heard His call
I turned my back and left it all.*

*I could not stay another day
to laugh, to love, to work or play
Tasks left undone must stay that way
I found that peace at the close of day.*

*If my parting has left a void
then fill it with remembered joy.
A friendship shared, a laugh, a kiss,
Oh yes, these things I too will miss.*

*Be not burdened with times of sorrow
I wish you the sunshine of tomorrow
My life's been full, I savored much,
Good friends, good times, a loved one's touch.*

*Perhaps my time seemed all to brief -
Don't lengthen it now with undue grief.
Lift up your heart and peace to thee -
God wanted me now: He set me free.*

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