

Foam Signs Are Light In Weight, But Durable

Many folks have been fooled by signs and props made by Innovative Foam of Hutchinson, Minn. Their creations can look like brick, stone or a variety of other materials. From lettered signs and monument signs for businesses to architectural gates and walls, if you can dream it, Innovative Foam can build it.

The business started in 2004 when Glen Kadelbach made foam props for his wife's photography business. People took notice, and he started making signs, architectural moldings and other items for customers. Dean Bertram worked with Kadelbach and eventually purchased the business.

"I'm a machinist by trade, so I like building things. I was ready for something different," Bertram says.

He explains that the foam and Styrofoam® used are stronger and have higher densities than ordinary foams. One photo on the business's website shows a 4-wheeler parked on an arched piece of foam. Wood stakes and other fasteners can

be used to secure the lightweight foam pieces in place.

Finished pieces are sealed with a plastic coating to protect them from the weather.

"A foam sign will outlive a brick monument sign," Bertram says.

Using CNC machines and other cutting methods, there isn't much he can't create, he notes. Past Innovative Foam projects include archways for events and proms, a grain bin, a couch, and displays strong enough to support woodstoves. More typical projects are lettered signs and pillars. Bertram also works with manufacturing companies that need custom foam packaging.

Prices vary according to the complexity of the project, and they can be easily shipped anywhere. "I'm pretty much open to try anything. I discuss ideas with the customer to see what will work," he says.

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If you can dream it, Innovative Foam can build it, says the company. Their creations can look like brick, stone or a variety of other materials.



Items the company makes include everything from lettered signs and monument signs for businesses to architectural gates and walls.



Where To Buy Cheese-Making Equipment

Whether you make cheese for your family or want to start an artisan cheese business, Kallijah Paraska and her husband, Phil Segami, have all the rennets, cultures, molds, plastic cheese molds and kits you need. And because they buy in bulk from manufacturers, they pass big savings on to their customers.

Born and raised in a Wisconsin cheese-making community, Paraska knows about cheese and how to make it. She works as a business development officer and lives in Washington, but she and her husband wanted to establish a cheese-related business to take them into retirement in a few years. Though they make cheese for their own personal use, Paraska decided to use her knowledge of the cheese making process and sales skills to sell supplies. So, the couple started The Cheese Connection in 2010.

"We get supplies from 20 companies in France, Italy, Canada and New Zealand,"

Paraska says. "And we get one plastic cheese mold from a U.S. company. We have over 200 products on our website."

Among them are 70 different plastic cheese molds, with 9,000 units in stock. The Cheese Connection is the only U.S. distributor of disposable molds for Caprino cheese, a popular soft cheese made with goat milk.

"We get requests for plastic cheese molds from consumer cheese makers in Europe. Our prices are cheaper sent from the U.S. in flat priority boxes than it is for them to buy it locally," Paraska says.

After a couple years in the business, the couple knows what their customers need, and they maintain adequate supplies so they can usually fill last minute orders. Cultures and rennets have a shelf life (from 6 months to a year), so they move rennets within 45 to 60 days. Products are kept refrigerated or frozen; deep frozen products are stored in a cryogenics freezer.

One of the cultures that they have access

to that's only manufactured in France is P. Album, a Penicillium Roqueforti in freeze-dried form. The Cheese Connection also works with creameries, signing confidentiality agreements to protect proprietary information on cultures each particular creamery uses.

Paraska notes that they keep prices down, because they don't provide expert advice. They refer customers to experts for that service.

Spring is an especially busy time after animals give birth, and cheese makers have a lot of milk to work with. Paraska and Segami accommodate customers with speedy shipping as needed. They personally deliver orders of more than \$500 within a couple hundred miles of their Seattle, Wash., home. Midnight cultures and rennet runs to creameries is not uncommon to them.

All orders are taken by phone or through their website.

"We continue to add new products monthly, so come back and visit our site regularly,"



Paraska and Segami offer more than 200 different cheese-making products.

Paraska says.

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Demand Still Strong For Old-Fashioned Whitewashing

Despite the ever-increasing number of mega dairy farms with large milking parlors made with washable walls, whitewashing is still a viable business. At 75, Thomas Harrison has whitewashed thousands of barns in the Northeast over the past 42 years, and is mentoring a young man to take over his business.

Whitewashing is a traditional, natural way to sanitize stanchion dairy barns with hydrated lime and water. Unless walls can be washed, dairy inspectors often require whitewashing annually, and most of Harrison's customers are dairy farmers. Whitewashing penetrates well into rough boards, so some of his customers also use it to brighten old barns. It's also used on homes that have been in a fire to eliminate the smell of smoke and for mold and mildew in homes that have been flooded.

"Whitewashing brightens things up," Harrison says. "It doesn't look much different when you first put it on, but as it dries it gets whiter."

He witnessed the most dramatic results when he whitewashed a cave where a businesswoman stored her artisan cheeses.

It was pure dark when he started, and after drying for a short time it lightened up.

While generally used for interior spaces, he has whitewashed the hub fence at a racetrack. After a rain, it looks grey, but when it dries it turns white again.

Harrison also whitewashes stables and fairgrounds in his territory, which includes parts of New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Vermont.

"Travel is the biggest challenge," he says, noting he often travels hours from his Eagle Bridge, N.Y., home.

Work was closer to home when he first started the sideline business while driving milk truck in 1969. One of the farmers nagged him into whitewashing his barn. With no idea what he was getting into, Harrison bought an old pickup truck and orchard sprayer for \$100, and then learned how to mix and spray whitewash.

Because he knew farmers and inspectors from his job, his part-time work grew into a full-time job. He eventually added an air compressor for cleaning and upgraded to a trailer-mounted system. Harrison's current hydraulic system includes a 300-



Thomas Harrison has whitewashed thousands of dairy barns in the Northeast over the past 42 years and is mentoring a young man to take over his business.

gal. stainless steel tank, 250 ft. of hose and a pressure washer.

He blows off the surface to be whitewashed with the air compressor, mixes lime and water to the consistency of latex paint and sprays the mixture at 300 to 350 psi.

The work is seasonal from March to November.

While there are fewer dairies to whitewash, he notes there may be other markets – Amish

farmers and people with goats, sheep and horses.

Though he never intended to be a whitewasher, the business has provided a good living, he says.

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