

# SLIPPERY ROCK

## GAZETTE

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THE BEACON OF THE STONE INDUSTRY [www.slipperyrockgazette.net](http://www.slipperyrockgazette.net)

## Luxury Marble and Granite

### Building a Reputation for Quality and Service

Imagine, if you will, what it might feel like if you and your family were forced to abandon your beloved home and country, with only the clothes on your back and a few personal items, and flee for your life to avoid a horrific situation. The Cambodian Genocide between 1975 and 1979 was just this situation. It was the gruesome, shocking and systematic killing of millions of Cambodian citizens by a government known as the Khmer Rouge... Certainly not humanity's finest hour.

There's an old saying: What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Certainly the trials, tribulations, durability and strength of any person or family who survived that genocide, will stand as testament to that saying and, speaks volumes about the success of Vu Ly, Co-owner of Luxury Marble and Granite, as well as his parents Sen Thach and Sidel Ly, recalled Vu Ly. "Looking back, I really appreciate my parents taking that risk. I have nine brothers and sisters, and we escaped on foot. We were very fortunate."

After fleeing Cambodia, the family first took refuge in Thailand, then

by Peter J. Marcucci

Photos Courtesy Luxury Marble and Granite

the Philippines, and then immigrated to California. Vu was only three years old at the time, and briefly recalled what it was like growing up in San Bernardino. "We were living in a housing project like any other refuge family. In high school, I was in the ROTC, and was going to join the Navy when I graduated."

By age fifteen, due to a fine mixture of luck, good parenting and destiny, Vu's parents gave him a flight from California to Massachusetts to briefly work with his brother who worked for a stone fabrication company, Vu recalled. "My brother, David Lee, had told my parents that all the brothers could come, and he would get them a job fabricating. So I went, and my brother said the job was just for summer vacation, and I said, 'No problem!' However, I soon found out that I was given only a one-way ticket. I was young and naive, but I knew I would never be returning to California."

A few years later, circa 1999, Vu's parents moved to Massachusetts, leased some



Photo courtesy HGTV: The Nate and Jeremiah Home Project

Kitchen remodel featured on *The Nate and Jeremiah Home Project*, Season 2. Luxury Marble and Granite fabricated and installed the marble tops and floating shelves.

property, and opened up a fabrication company called American Marble and Granite, where the family could work collectively. His mom, being very wise and business-minded, knew this was the best thing for the family, said Vu. "She had told us to never stay and work for somebody. Learn the field, and open your own company."

Unfortunately, due to the sale of the property where their business was located, the company closed its doors five years later,

and the family business had to split up.

In 2001, Vu's brother Tom Ly opened another company in Marshfield, Massachusetts, called Boston Galaxy Marble and Granite. The company flourished for 9 years. During this time, Vu's brother, David Lee, had also opened a new company in Kingston, New Hampshire called Delta Stone, and it's still in business, today.

[Please turn to page 2](#)

## BB Industries Hosts Annual Partners in Paradise Event in Cancun, Mexico

IN April, BB Industries hosted its annual celebration trip to thank customers and vendors for their partnership—the Third Annual Partners in Paradise event and awards ceremony.

Partners in Paradise is a rewards trip for BB Industries customers who have met a sales percentage, as well as for vendor partners who help sponsor the event. This relaxed, four-day business trip offers opportunities for networking and best practice-sharing at a destination resort. There are roundtable discussions, with

presentations sprinkled in, and the annual awards ceremony is a highlight of the event.

Congratulations go out to the following BBI Partners and Award Winners: **Konkus Marble** received the BBI 2022 Presidential Excellence Award; **Atlanta Kitchens** – the Pinnacle Award for Largest Volume in 2022. **The Countertop Factory**, **Midwest/Southwest** received the Diamond Partnership Award for 2022; and **Wisnaker Builder Service**, the Outstanding Growth in 2022 award.

[Please turn to page 4](#)



Jeff Dykstra of BB Industries welcomes customer partners and vendors to the 2023 Partners in Paradise event in Cancun, Mexico.

## Luxury Marble and Granite

*Continued from page 1*

As for Vu, in 2006, he met the young woman who is now his wife, Wendy Jiang. The couple fell in love, took a leap of faith and moved to New York City where they would finally settle down, and open the doors to Luxury Marble and Granite, in 2017.

“Wendy Jiang, and also her parents, supported my ambitions from the very beginning. She was the one who told me that now is the time to quit your full time job and focus on your ‘side job,’ and we eventually turned it into our business. She even gave up her CPA which she worked so hard for, and joined me into opening up another store called Luxury Kitchen and Bath; she learned how to design kitchens from scratch and became extremely good at it! She also appears with me on *The Nate and Jeremiah Home Project*, Season One. She’s my inspiration and the true backbone of our company!”

### *Build it and They Will Come*

The first location of Luxury Marble and Granite was in a 1,700 square foot building in Staten Island, N.Y. This location was soon outgrown, and the couple moved to a 10,000 square foot building in 2022, their current location, also in Staten Island.

In the beginning, Vu and Wendy Jiang built their clientele through Craigslist posts, giving commissions to the sales people who posted them. The business grew, and was now well on its way as a residential fabricator, serving walk-in owners, designers and builders. The company currently averages 120 kitchens per month with many sales coming through word-of-mouth referrals, Vu explained.

“Our quality and turnaround times are great, but it’s our service that makes us stand out. We treat our customers like family. We are very honest with them, and walk them through every step of the process. Most customers feel very comfortable working with us, and many don’t refer to us as a company. They say, ‘Call Vu! He’s a friend of mine!’”

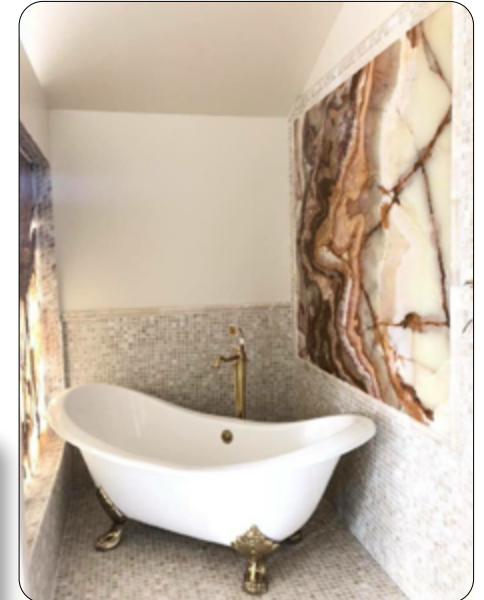
**Mitered islands and full-height backsplashes are popular choices in the upscale New York kitchens produced for Luxury Marble and Granite’s customers.**



According to Vu, 50% of yearly sales are walk-in, 25% are from builders, with the remainder being from privately-owned showrooms throughout the area. Many clients get their first exposure to the company’s work at these showrooms, he continued. “We give them our standard price list, and any job they sell they send it to us for fabrication and installation. We do everything, including templating.”

Unlike many fabrication shops these days, Vu prefers making corrugated plastic templates instead of using a laser, mostly so clients can physically see where their countertops are being cut from the slabs during layout. As for material ratios, Luxury Marble and Granite cuts approximately 85% quartz and 10% quartzite with the remaining 5% being marble, granite and porcelain, all the while maintaining the highest quality possible, continued Vu.

*Please turn to page 3*



**This elegant master bath features two onyx wall panels inset in the tiled walls.**

**Left: This round-end quartz bar top features an illuminated front panel.**

**Below: Marble master bath with walk-in shower and double vanity with mitered apron.**



## Luxury Marble and Granite

*Continued from page 2*

“When we started the company, I intended to bring great quality to all of my residential customers. Yes, you get what you pay for, but I wanted my customers to get more than what they paid for. At that time, we were only doing one or two kitchens per week, and we could put a lot of quality into the work. Now there’s times when we’re doing 25 to 30 kitchens per week. That’s fairly small volume for New York City, and even though we are busier than we used to be, overall, our quality is still better than many other shops. We also stand behind our work. In this business, everybody makes mistakes. I don’t care how good you are. But when we make a mistake, we jump right on it, with no excuses, and take care of it right away.”

### Networking Makes a Difference

Vu is also an active member of the International Surface Fabricators Association (ISFA). He joined specifically to attend their three-day porcelain training classes in Knoxville, TN, he explained. “My wife signed me up, and I went to learn how to fabricate porcelain. It was the best experience I’ve ever had as a fabricator! I had thought that when you go there, everybody’s going to be strict and business-like, but it was more like family. We learned so much about how porcelain is made, and how to fabricate it, and I now love it. The fabricators there were

**Below: projects fabricated and installed for a Season One home featured on *The Nate and Jeremiah Home Project*. Marble kitchen with full-height matching marble backsplash, and matching marble fireplace surround in the adjacent family room space.**



**This rustic outdoor kitchen features granite tops set on fieldstone.**

very open and willing to share trade secrets, which I found like WOW! If you’re in New York City, your neighbors will never tell you anything! I’m a very helpful person, and if you need something, and I can help you, I will! What goes around—comes around.”

### Plans for the Future

“Over the next five years, my plan is to go international, open a company in every state, and have our countertops in every house in America! But right now we are targeting New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and trying to get more into the commercial world, especially using Dekton and porcelain. I also believe that every fabricator out there should join the ISFA. The organization and its members are like family, and we can definitely help each other grow, and depend on each other in the future.”

For more information, visit [www.luxmarblegranite.com](http://www.luxmarblegranite.com). Vu and Wendy Jiang’s work is also featured on HGTV’s *The Nate and Jeremiah Home Project, Seasons One and Two*.



**Vu Ly: “This Calacatta Gold kitchen included walls and floor tiles chosen to match.”**



**River White granite island and countertops with ogee edge for a client’s kitchen remodel.**



## Special Features in this Issue...



**SLIPPERY ROCK GAZETTE®**  
The Voice of the Stone Fabricator

Luxury Marble and Granite: Building a Reputation for Quality and Service, by Peter Marcucci ..... [Begins on 1](#)  
Dakota Mahogany: Core of the Continent, by Karin Kirk ..... [Begins on 13](#)

### Training, Safety and Education

Industry Calendar of Events and Training: June to August 2023..... [5](#)  
Invest in Your Employees, by Zack Smycer ..... [8](#)  
What Will Your Sales Be in September? by Ed Young ..... [9](#)  
Top Ten SEO Optimizations for Your Countertop Shop's Website, by Stephen Alberts ..... [10](#)  
The Synchronous Flow Operating System, by Rick Phelps ..... [12](#)

### Industry Topics, Tips and Featured Columns

Why Fabricators Should "Systemize the Predictable," by Katherine Gifford ..... [Begins on 14](#)  
Juice Jacking, by Sharon Koehler ..... [Begins on 18](#)  
Stone Restoration and Maintenance Corner – Hand Tools Revisited, by Bob Murrell ..... [Begins on 19](#)  
Take Action with Your Cash Flow, by Josiah Vander Maas ..... [20](#)  
Great Minds Think Alike– Doesn't that Mean Idiots Do, Too? by Eric Rolseth ..... [Begins on 21](#)  
Tired of Murder Hornets? How 'Bout Parachute Spiders? by Sam Venable ..... [23](#)  
The Stone Detective – CSI or CSI? by Frederick M. Hueston ..... [27](#)

### Industry News

BB Industries Hosts Annual Partners in Paradise Event in Cancun, Mexico ..... [Begins on 1](#)  
Fifth Gear Technologies Acquires ETemplate Systems ..... [Begins on 5](#)  
Masonry Contractors Association of America and the Masonry Alliance Program ..... [Begins on 6](#)  
Natural Stone Institute Completes 47th Home with Gary Sinise Foundation ..... [8](#)  
2023 NTCA Tile Person of the Year: Joe and Wendi Kerber ..... [14](#)  
BACA Systems Fabrication Seminar to Showcase Equipment Demos and Industry Insights ..... [16](#)  
IMS Partners with Cape Fear Manufacturing Partnership to Build Future Workforce ..... [17](#)  
Groves Introduces Heavy-Duty Tool Storage System ..... [21](#)  
Marketplace and Classified Ads ..... [24, 25](#)

## Contributors & Staff

Rick Stimac	Publisher
Larry M. Hood	Editor and Design Director
G. William Brown	Graphic Designer
Stephen Alberts	Countertop Marketing Co.
Mark Anderson	Department of Humor
Rick Phelps	Synchronous Solutions
Katherine Gifford	Moraware
Frederick M. Hueston	Stone Forensics Investigations
Ed Hill	Synchronous Solutions
Sharon Koehler	Stone Industry Consultant
Rufus B. Leakin	Guru of Urban Folklore
Bob Murrell	Restoration Consultant
Eric Rolseth	Stone Fabricator's Alliance
Ed Young	Fabricator's Business Coach
Sam Venable	Department of Irony

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## BBI Hosts Annual Partners in Paradise Event in Cancun



*Continued from page 1*

"We love this time with our customer and vendor partners because we get to know them on a personal and not just a professional level," said Rick Stimac, BB Industries CEO and President. "Picking great partners is one of the ways we are successful, and we like to share the success with everyone. It's a great way of saying 'Thank You' to our special partners in an informal setting."

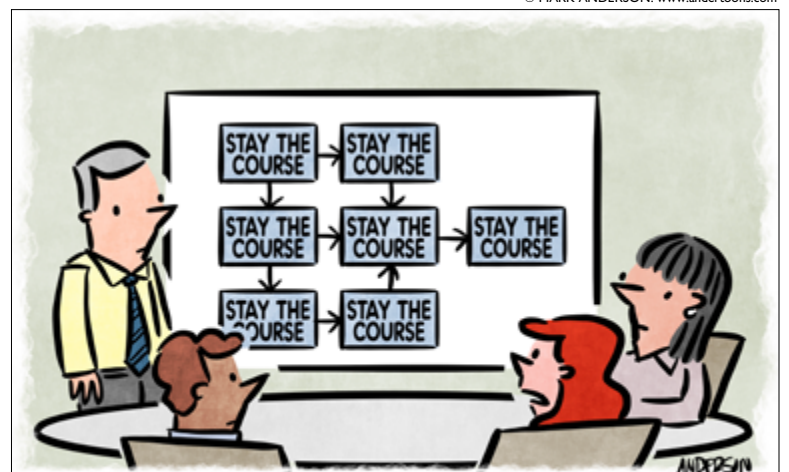
The free time festivities include golfing, dancing, swapping stone stories, and enjoying the luxury accommodations provided by the resort.

Vendor Partners sponsoring this year's event included

Integra, Marmo Meccanica, Park Industries, Poseidon, Tenax USA and Weha USA.

*Since its beginning in 1994, BBI's philosophy has been to offer the best customer service in the industry and the best value stone fabrication products. We are right there for our customers through all phases of business with education, training, and support from CNCs to blades. Our vendors and customers are valued partners. For more info, visit [BBIndustriesLLC.com](http://BBIndustriesLLC.com), and [BBIndustriesLLC](https://www.facebook.com/BBIndustriesLLC) on social media channels LinkedIn, Instagram, and [facebook.com/BBIndustriesLLC](https://www.facebook.com/BBIndustriesLLC).*

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"I'm fine with our strategy, I just don't think it merited a meeting."

## INDUSTRY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### June 2023

#### NSI: Minnesota Stone Summit

**When:** June 1, 2023

**Where:** Plymouth, Minnesota, UGM Surfaces

#### ISFA Certified Solid Surface Fabrication Training

**When:** Tuesday, June 6 to Wednesday, June 7, 2023

**Where:** Lakewood Countertops, Lakewood, WA

Visit [www.isfanow.org/calendar](http://www.isfanow.org/calendar) for more information and to register.

#### NTCA Regional GPTP/Slabs Training

**When:** Thursday, June 8, 2023

**Where:** Floor & Decor, Orlando, FL

Visit <http://www.tile-assn.com> to register and for more information

#### Rockheads Member Event: Shop Tour and Roundtable

**When:** Wednesday, June 14 – Friday, June 16, 2023

**Where:** AMC Countertops, McDermott Top Shop, Milwaukee, WI

Visit [www.rockheadsusa.com](http://www.rockheadsusa.com) for more information and to join.

#### NSI: Oregon Stone Summit

**When:** June 15, 2023

**Where:** Arizona Tile, Beaverton, Oregon;

Visit [Naturalstoneinstitute.org](http://Naturalstoneinstitute.org) for more info.

### July 2023

#### ISFA New Member Workshop / Onboarding

**When:** Wednesday, July 12, 2023 – 2:00PM- 3:00 PM

**Where:** Virtual Event

Visit [www.isfanow.org/calendar](http://www.isfanow.org/calendar) for more information and to register.

#### ISFA Fabricator Crawl

**When:** Wednesday, July 19 – Thursday July 20, 2023

**Where:** Chicago, IL – Details TBA

Visit [www.isfanow.org/calendar](http://www.isfanow.org/calendar) for more information and to register.

#### NSI: Pennsylvania Stone Summit

**When:** Thursday, July 20, 2023

**Where:** Hosted by MSI; Speaker– Blake Christensen, Valley View Granite

Visit [Naturalstoneinstitute.org](http://Naturalstoneinstitute.org) for more info.

### August 2023

#### ISFA Vanity Workshop Training and Certification

**When:** Wednesday August 8- Thursday 9, 2023

**Where:** Gecko Solid Surface Solutions, San Antonio, Texas

Visit [www.isfanow.org/calendar](http://www.isfanow.org/calendar) for more information and to register.

#### Rockheads

**When:** Thursday August 9 – Friday August 10, 2023

**Where:** The Countertop Factory, Chicago, Illinois

Visit [www.rockheadsusa.com](http://www.rockheadsusa.com) for more information and to register.

#### ISFA General Member Meeting

**When:** Thursday August 31, 2023 – 2:00PM- 3:00 PM

**Where:** Virtual Event

Visit [www.isfanow.org/calendar](http://www.isfanow.org/calendar) for more information and to register.

**Other regional and online event opportunities are available through the industry association websites listed above.**



## How Do You Compare?

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[naturalstoneinstitute.org/accreditation](http://naturalstoneinstitute.org/accreditation)

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## Fifth Gear Technologies Acquires ETemplate Systems

Fifth Gear Technologies, a leading provider of software solutions for the countertop industry, recently announced that it has completed the acquisition of ETemplate Systems, an award-winning laser technology company known for its industry-leading precision in templating and design processes for the countertop, cabinet and millwork industries.



The acquisition of ETemplate is a strategic move for Fifth Gear Technologies, allowing the company to expand its portfolio of innovative software solutions and strengthen its position in the market. The addition of ETemplate's talented team and technology will enhance Fifth Gear Technologies' ability to offer customers new and innovative products to meet the unique business needs of our customers.

"We are thrilled to welcome the ETemplate team to the Fifth Gear Technologies family," said Steve Mast, partner at Fifth Gear Technologies. "Their expertise in developing best-in-class laser measuring products, teamed up with Fifth Gear's expertise in building innovative, customer focused software, will result in exciting new solutions for our customers and the industries we serve. With the entire ETemplate team joining Fifth Gear, there will be continuity in the operation and current customers' experience will not change."

[Please turn to page 11](#)

# The PREMIER TRADE GROUP

of the Stone Fabrication Industry



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Benchmarks



Group Purchasing

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## Natural Stone Institute Completes 47th Home with Gary Sinise Foundation



Natural stone and fabrication for U.S. Marine Corps Corporal and Police Officer Sharif Muzayen were provided by UMI and Florida Custom Marble.

The Natural Stone Institute has provided natural stone and fabrication services for its 47th home with the Gary Sinise Foundation through its R.I.S.E. (Restoring Independence Supporting Empowerment) program. The Foundation's R.I.S.E. program builds 100% mortgage-free specially adapted smart homes for severely wounded veterans and first responders. Natural stone and fabrication for U.S. Marine Corps Corporal and Police Officer Sharif Muzayen were provided by UMI and Florida Custom Marble.

Sharif enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 2008 and served for five years. He was deployed to Afghanistan, where he held multiple positions including becoming a Non-Commission Officer in Charge in the Cross Unit Combat Operations Center as the liaison between American Armed Forces and the Afghan Units. In 2013, Sharif was honorably discharged as a Corporal.

After leaving the Marine Corps, Sharif immediately began pre-academy training at the Orange Police Department. Upon completion of field training, Sharif requested to specialize in identifying and arresting suspected DUI drivers. Before his injuries, Sharif was successful in arresting 75 individuals for driving under the influence. On December 10, 2016, while responding to a report of a possible drunk driver, Sharif was struck by another oncoming drunk driver while pulling forms

from his vehicle. The collision left him with a broken tibia, fibula, a severed femoral artery, and a brain hemorrhage.

After many weeks in recovery and the support of his family, Sharif was released to go home, where he would begin a two-year journey of rehabilitation with physical therapy and undergo multiple surgeries. In December 2019, Sharif underwent surgery to have his left leg amputated above the knee. Today, Sharif and his family reside in St. Mary's, Georgia. Sharif hopes to complete his degree in biology and ultimately get a doctorate in herpetology, the study of reptiles and amphibians. In his downtime, Sharif enjoys playing board games, watching movies, and playing video games with his family.

Companies interested in getting involved with future projects are encouraged to email [rise@naturalstoneinstitute.org](mailto:rise@naturalstoneinstitute.org). To learn more, and to see a list of all Natural Stone Institute members who have donated their time, products, and services to this cause, visit [www.naturalstoneinstitute.org/RISE](http://www.naturalstoneinstitute.org/RISE).

**“Be a yardstick of quality. Some people aren't used to an environment where excellence is expected.”**

— Steve Jobs

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## TRAINING & EDUCATION

# Invest in Your Employees

It is common knowledge that machinery is a big part of the stone business. I often hear how a company's machines become their "best employee that never gets sick and always shows up." It's true that machinery has changed the game when it comes to efficiency and productivity. This isn't a proclamation arguing against it. Just like that machine needs regular maintenance to remain working properly, employees need training to not just remain working properly, but to grow.

When a company invests in an employee's growth they invest in their business. Regular training fights off complacency and helps grow the arsenal of skills an employee can wield within your business. From your fabricators to the sales staff, your business should have a foundation for learning.

First off, a proper training program for new hires should be rock solid and

**Zack Smyser**  
*Stone Industry Consultant*

regimented. Developing a program can be time-consuming, but remember: you're investing in your employees just like that CNC machine. Without an individual who knows how to properly operate it, the return on investment on that expensive machine will be stunted. A new employee should have guidelines on what skills they need to acquire, and the time frame in which they are expected to become proficient.

Whoever you've tasked with training should also have guidelines on tracking their progress. Doing this allows your new employee to feel secure in what's expected of them and how they are acclimating to the new position. It also can be tied to a roadmap for pay raises and promotions. If your new employee hasn't quite mastered the skills you've set out in the next tier of training, help create more opportunities



for training. Remember, you're investing in that individual and their success is your success.

This also has benefits for both parties: the trainee and the person you've tasked with training. The trainee learns a skill and the trainer gains experience leading and managing. Eventually, your new hire develops their skills and becomes a bigger asset to the business and can one day become the next generation of trainers. This cycle can help continually grow your team and their skills and in turn, your business.

If you aren't already, becoming a member of The Natural Stone Institute opens you to a wealth of training modules across all aspects of the industry, from Safe Slab Handling to marketing and sales strategy roundtables.

Separate from in-house training—look to the stone industry community for resources. We are fortunate to have such a large group of passionate stone professionals who are always looking for ways to push the industry forward and help a fellow fabricator out. Stone Fabricator's Alliance and All Slab Fabbers are just two organizations that bring the stone community together, and have become a huge resource for group problem-solving and skill development. Both organizations hold multiple workshops across the country that tackle training challenges and spotlight new and improved procedures and equipment.

*Zack Smyser is a Richmond, VA native with over a decade of experience through various roles within a stone countertop shop. Zack has a passion for all things stone-related, and takes a visionary approach to providing creative design solutions that are focused on the customer experience. He is currently employed at Granite International in Cicero, NY. Send your comments to [publisher@slipperyrockgazette.net](mailto:publisher@slipperyrockgazette.net).*

# STONEBIZ PUERTO RICO On The Beach

*Business Seminars*

**Gino Wickman** - Entrepreneur and author of the best-selling "Traction - Get a grip on your business" book library which has sold over 3million copies! He is the founder of EOS (entrepreneurial operating systems) Worldwide, an organization that has helped over 190,000 companies succeed with his operating systems. His skills include helping leaders run better businesses, get better control, have better life balance, and gain more traction while working as a cohesive team!

**Casey Brown** - a pricing expert and the president of Boost Pricing! Her slogan is "IF YOU ARE EXCELLENT AT WHAT YOU DO, YOU SHOULD BE PAID LIKE YOU ARE EXCELLENT." Casey is a prominent global keynote speaker, with a resume in the fortune 500 and TEDX talks!

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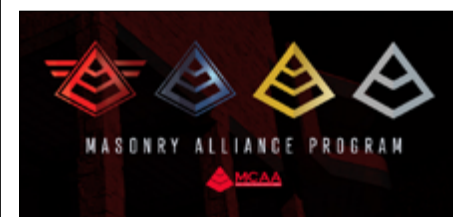
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## Masonry Contractors Association of America and the Masonry Alliance Program



For nearly 75 years, the MCAA has served as a focal point for the \$33 billion masonry industry by connecting and empowering business decision makers around the country. As the Association expands upon existing efforts, it will also develop new offerings to cement the MCAA's place for the next seven decades and beyond. One of these offerings, aimed at masonry industry suppliers, will be the Masonry Alliance Program.

*Please turn to page 11*



# TRAINING & EDUCATION

## What Will Your Sales Be in September?

Predicting the future is always a challenge — ask any weatherman. The problem is, if we don't know what the future holds, it is very tough to make sound business plans. Intuition is inadequate. Guessing just won't do. We NEED data!

The question is “How do we get that data?”

There are several different sources and levels of data that we can readily access: national economic data, regional economic data, and your leading indicators. If you pull all this data together, you can begin to predict what your sales may be in September.

### National Economic Data

There are 3 primary sources for national economic data:

- 1) **General news broadcasting companies** (NBC, ABC, FOX, etc.)
- 2) **Financial publications** (Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg, Barron's, etc.)
- 3) **Subscription services** (ITR Economics and others).

While all information sources are susceptible to human bias, paid subscription services appear to be the most objective of the three data sources above. With any of the sources listed, it pays to understand the data analysis methodology behind the reporting. You don't have to be a statistician to know that there is a difference between tracking trends, conducting correlation analysis, and deep statistical analysis. So, dig a little deeper to understand what the information you are consuming is based on.

It is helpful to select at least two or three sources of economic data and track them regularly. Comparing the analysis of the various sources can inform your conclusions. Tracking sources over time will help you understand economic trends ahead.

### Regional Economic Data

Every geographical region has an organization dedicated to economic development (ED). Sometimes this team is embedded in the state Department of Commerce (DOC) and sometimes it is a separate organization that works with the state DOC. The ED team regularly publishes data on what companies are moving into their area. It also publishes how many jobs are associated with those moves, and whether those jobs are blue-collar factory floor workers, white-collar managers, skilled trades, etc.

### Ed Young Fabricator's Business Coach

The state DOC typically publishes a broad array of economic data including housing starts, home sales, employment data, and much more (see Fig. 1). From the ED and DOC sources, it isn't difficult to understand what the demand for housing will be in the different market segments you serve (custom home builders, big box, production builders, commercial, etc.).

### Your Backyard

Closer to home, your Home Builders Association (HBA can be a surprisingly good source of information. While your customers may not attend, you should find other companies that work in the same

	July				August				September			
	#Jobs	Avg job	Conf.	Total	#Jobs	Avg job	Conf.	Total	#Jobs	Avg job	Conf.	Total
<b>Current B2B Customers</b>												
Bob the Builder	2	\$30,000	100%	\$60,000	4	\$30,000	100%	\$120,000	5	\$30,000	100%	\$150,000
Chris the Contractor	4	\$10,000	100%	\$40,000	5	\$10,000	100%	\$50,000	3	\$10,000	100%	\$30,000
Karen's K&B	10	\$20,000	80%	\$160,000	15	\$20,000	80%	\$240,000	12	\$20,000	80%	\$192,000
<b>SubTotal Current</b>				<b>\$260,000</b>				<b>\$410,000</b>				<b>\$372,000</b>
<b>Prospect B2B Customers</b>												
Kris Kitchens	9	\$25,000	60%	\$135,000	15	\$25,000	60%	\$225,000	11	\$25,000	60%	\$165,000
Karen Kitchens	5	\$20,000	70%	\$70,000	6	\$20,000	70%	\$84,000	7	\$20,000	70%	\$98,000
Expensive Homes R Us	3	\$50,000	90%	\$135,000	3	\$50,000	90%	\$135,000	3	\$50,000	90%	\$135,000
<b>SubTotal Prospect</b>				<b>\$340,000</b>				<b>\$444,000</b>				<b>\$398,000</b>
<b>Total</b>				<b>\$600,000</b>				<b>\$854,000</b>				<b>\$770,000</b>

Fig 2: An example of how to track the forecast data from your current B2B customers along with your prospects.

that market segment performing this year. Having authentic business conversations like this can also build the rapport needed to later make sales calls to those companies.

### Your Forecast

Now that you have a sense of how to read the national and regional economic tea leaves, you can drill down on a sales forecast for your fab shop.

The next step is to talk to your current B2B customers. As with the HBA conversations, you want to understand how each customer thinks this year will work out compared to last year. Task each of your salespeople with

will be driven by your knowledge of that customer along with the information you gathered from the national and regional forecasts. Totalling this data by month tells you what to expect from your existing B2B customer base. Compare that to the corresponding month for last year to understand if sales will increase or decrease – and by how much.

Next, as your outside salespeople talk to prospects, they should ask these same questions and collect the same information. Here the confidence levels are likely lower because, in addition to assessing the accuracy of the prospect's predictions, you have to include your assessment of the likelihood you will get the work.

From here the math is simple. But don't stop with totaling the numbers for each month. You should step back, analyze the data, and determine what you think will really happen based on economic forecasts and your own experience.

This is where your intuition based on your years of experience can guide you to develop a reasonable sales forecast for your company.

Once you have your sales forecast developed, don't put it on a shelf (or leave it in a file on your desktop). The forecast should be a living document. At least monthly, you should gather your sales team (even if it is a one-person team) and review the forecast. Adjust any data that has changed. Track how well you perform against what you predicted.

Where have you fallen short and where have you exceeded your projections – and why?

Using the data above to build and update your sales forecast is a major component in helping you run your company instead of it running you.

*This changing economy will generate significant headwinds for many fabricators. If you need assistance planning for these challenges, reach out to a seasoned business owner and coach at [Ed@FabricatorsCoach.com](mailto:Ed@FabricatorsCoach.com). You deserve to have a business that not only makes you money but also allows you time to enjoy it.*

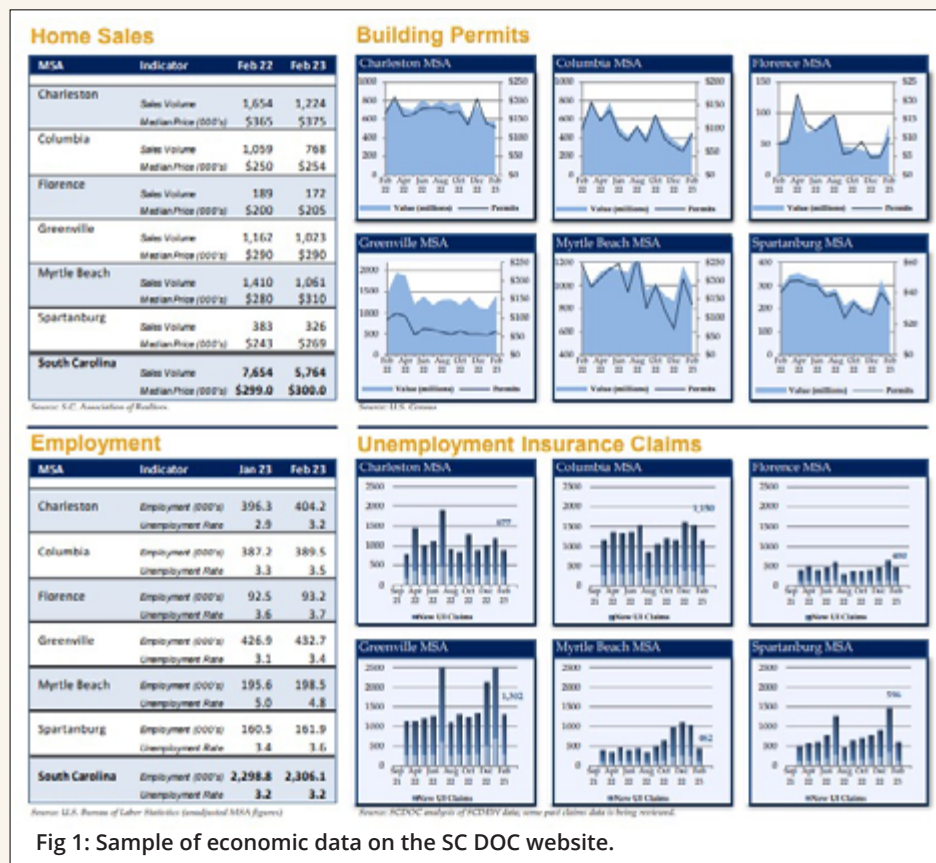


Fig 1: Sample of economic data on the SC DOC website.

market segments. If you currently sell into the custom home builder segment and meet a builder who works in that segment but isn't your customer, you can ask things like: “How many homes did you build last year?” and “How many homes do you plan to build this year?” Several conversations like that can generate a good feel for how others see

having these conversations with your existing customers.

It is imperative to track the data from these conversations (see Fig. 2). List each customer and, for each month, show the anticipated number of jobs, the average countertop budget for these jobs, and the confidence level of the data. Your confidence level

## TRAINING & EDUCATION

# Top Ten SEO Optimizations for Your Countertop Shop's Website

**I**f you own a countertop shop, having a website that is easily accessible and user-friendly is a must. One of the best ways to make your site easily discoverable is by optimizing it for search engines. By implementing the right SEO strategies, your site can rank higher on search engine results pages (SERPs), which can lead to increased traffic, better engagement, and more sales.

Here are the **Top 10 SEO Optimizations** you can make for your countertop shop's website:

### 1. Research Your Keywords

The first step to optimizing your site for search engines is conducting keyword research. This means finding the keywords and phrases that your potential customers use to search for countertop shops. You can use keyword research tools like Google Keyword Planner, SEMrush, and Ahrefs to identify high-traffic, low-competition keywords. Make sure to use long-tail keywords that are specific to your business and avoid generic, high-competition keywords. Also think about what your customers want! Granite countertops, quartz countertops, kitchen countertops, bathroom countertops, countertops your city, etcetera.

### 2. Optimize Page Titles and Descriptions

Page titles and descriptions are essential components of SEO optimization. These tags appear in search engine results and provide information about the content of your website. Make sure to include your target keywords in both the title and description of each page on your site. This not only helps search engines understand what your site is about but also makes your site more appealing to users.

### 3. Use Header Tags

Header tags (H1, H2, H3) are important for breaking up your content into easily readable sections. Use header tags to structure your content and make it more user-friendly. Additionally, including your target keywords in header tags helps search engines understand the context of your content.

**Stephen Alberts**  
*Countertop Marketing*

### 4. Create High-Quality Content

High-quality content is essential for both user engagement and search engine optimization. Create content that is informative, engaging, and relevant to your target audience. Make sure to include your target keywords naturally throughout your content, but avoid keyword stuffing. You can also create blog posts, infographics, and other types of content to keep your



audience engaged and encourage them to share your content with others. Like with keywords a great place to start with content is thinking about FAQ's your customers ask, such as:

- *What's the difference between granite and quartz?*
- *What material is the best to use in a bathroom?*
- *5 Things You Need to Know About Granite Countertops*

### 5. Build Backlinks

Backlinks are links from other websites that point to your site. They are an important factor in search engine rankings, as they signal to search engines that other sites consider your content to be valuable. There are several ways to build backlinks, including guest posting, influencer

**By following these top ten SEO optimizations, you can improve rankings and increase your online visibility**

outreach, and social media marketing. Just make sure to focus on quality over quantity and avoid spammy tactics. A great tactic is to sponsor something locally! This not only helps the community, you can also ask that organization to put a link back to your shop's site.

### 6. Use Alt Tags

Alt tags are descriptions of images that help search engines understand what the image is about. Make sure to include your target keywords in your alt tags to help improve your rankings. Additionally,

including alt tags makes your site more accessible to visually impaired users.

### 7. Improve Site Speed

Site speed is a crucial factor in both user experience and search engine rankings. Slow-loading websites can lead to high bounce rates and lower rankings. Use tools like Google PageSpeed Insights to identify ways to improve your site speed. Common ways to improve site speed include optimizing images, compressing files, and using caching.

### 8. Use Internal Linking

Internal linking is the process of linking to other pages on your site. This helps search engines understand the structure of your site and how pages are related to each other. Additionally, internal linking

can help keep users on your site for longer, as they can easily navigate to related content. Use internal linking strategically, and make sure to use anchor text that includes your target keywords.

### 9. Use Social Media

Social media can help improve your SEO by driving traffic to your site and generating backlinks. Make sure to include links to your site in your social media profiles and posts. Additionally, use social media to engage with your audience, promote your content, and build trust with homeowners in your community.

### 10. Monitor Your Results

Regularly monitor your site's performance using tools like Google Analytics and Google Search Console. This will help you identify areas for improvement and track your progress over time. Pay attention to metrics like traffic, bounce rate, and conversion rate, and make adjustments as needed. This will help ensure that your site continues to rank well in search engine results and attract new customers to your countertop shop.

Optimizing your countertop shop's website for search engines can help increase traffic, engagement, and sales. By conducting keyword research, optimizing page titles and descriptions, using header tags, creating high-quality content, building backlinks, using alt tags, improving site speed, using internal linking, using social media, and monitoring your performance, you can improve your site's visibility on search engine results pages and attract more potential homeowners to your shop. Keep in mind that SEO is an ongoing process, so make sure to regularly review and update your strategies to stay ahead of the competition. With these top 10 SEO optimizations, you can take your countertop shop website to the next level and land more projects!

*Stephen Alberts is the owner of the Countertop Marketing Co. and STONE ENGAGE. They specialize in helping countertop companies grow the retail side of their business outside of word-of-mouth and referrals. They also offer software to help you engage more with customers and close more countertop projects. To learn more, visit <https://countertopmarketingco.com/> or <https://stonengage.com>. You can also email Stephen at [steve@countertopmarketingco.com](mailto:steve@countertopmarketingco.com).*

# HIGH PERFORMANCE

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## HYS<sup>2</sup> – Hyper Speed Solution

HYS<sup>2</sup> tooling marked a revolutionary turn for Diamut, drastically increasing CNC feed rates and improving production. Constructed of premium materials and with a high-performance bond and diamonds, HYS<sup>2</sup>'s can reach an impressive 500"/min on the 2nd & 3rd diamonds, well above the promoted average feed rate of 270"/min.

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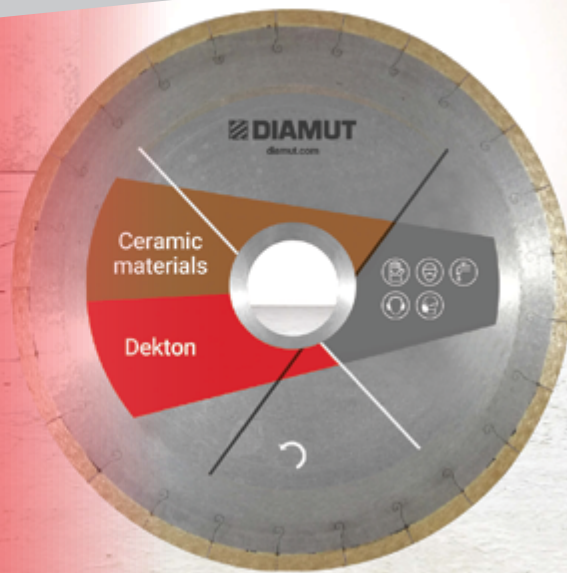
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## UNIKO

### EXCLUSIVE WET CUTTING BLADE for DEKTON & CERAMIC MATERIALS

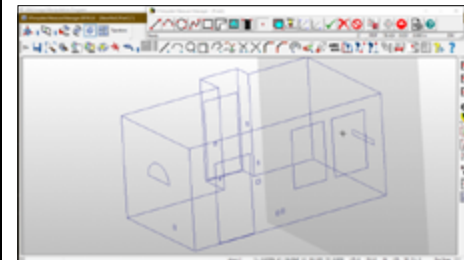
A unique blade providing the highest performance in the industry, especially developed for Dekton and Ceramic Materials wet cutting. With a single blade it is possible to process different materials without any tool changing.

# DIAMUT



## Fifth Gear

*Continued from page 5*



The ELaser Pro™ 3D system measures free-form 3D surfaces as well as 2D planar geometry.

ETemplate's products will now be integrated into Fifth Gear Technologies' existing suite of products and software solutions, which includes SPEEDlabel and SPEEDdraw. The acquisition will also allow Fifth Gear Technologies to expand its market reach and offer its solutions to a broader range of businesses.

"We are excited to join forces with Fifth Gear Technologies," said Paul Hansen, ETemplate founder. "Our team is eager to leverage the resources and expertise of Fifth Gear Technologies to continue creating innovative solutions for our customers."

*Fifth Gear Technologies is a leading technology solutions provider serving the countertop, cabinet and millwork industries across the globe. With a dedicated and highly skilled team, Fifth Gear uses its real industry experience to develop solutions tailored to meet the unique needs of its customers. For more information about Fifth Gear Technologies and its products, including SPEEDlabel, please visit [www.fifthgeartech.com](http://www.fifthgeartech.com). For information about the ETemplate Digital Measuring System please visit [www.ETemplatesystem.com](http://www.ETemplatesystem.com).*

advertising Insertion Orders, and soliciting sponsorships, we can focus on working together to make a greater impact on the industry."

Alliance Program specifics and availability will first be offered to current MCAA Strategic and Corporate Partners, then rolled out to all MCAA Supplier Members and the larger pool of industry manufacturers and providers.

The MCAA will soon launch a dedicated Alliance Program promotional deck and accompanying website to provide more information for those not currently in active discussions about the program.

*The Mason Contractors Association of America (MCAA) is the national trade association representing mason contractors.*

## Masonry Alliance Program

*Continued from page 8*

The program, which will open for availability in the summer, will go into effect in January 2024. It is designed to provide world-class, relationship-based immersion for industry suppliers. Items like event attendance, sponsorships,

advertising, and partnering with the MCAA on industry research will not be available outside of the Alliance Program.

"The Masonry Alliance Program leverages nearly all of the MCAA's efforts to help position our Alliance members as thought leaders within the industry," said Jeff Buczkiewicz, President and CEO. "The primary objective is to facilitate meaningful relationships between companies and contractors. At the same time,

suppliers will receive unprecedented and unparalleled exposure and service."

As part of the program, a new MCAA staff member will be responsible for managing operations and relationships with Alliance Members.

Todd Fredrick, Director of Development, added, "This new format streamlines our relationship with suppliers. Rather than focusing on recruiting suppliers for members, creating

## TRAINING & EDUCATION

# The Synchronous Flow Operating System

Imagine owning and operating a fabricating shop four or five times the size of a colleague's shop: Feels pretty good, doesn't it? Then you find out that while your top line is more than four times your colleague, his bottom line is more than twice yours. Ouch. Doesn't feel so great anymore, does it?

You have more problems and headaches, more responsibilities and have taken on far more risk, and yet you reap a fraction of the reward. Where's the joy in that?

It's especially painful because YOU used to be that other guy, running the smaller, more profitable shop. How did you get to this point?

It may be small solace, but you aren't the only one in this predicament. The team at Synchronous Solutions sees it far more often than anyone realizes, and we have been thinking a lot about why business owners so often grow themselves away from profitability. We believe we understand the mechanisms that lead to larger businesses making smaller profits. More importantly, we believe we know what to do about it.

We believe it is a lack of a framework of systems and structures within which to grow, that allows businesses to stray from the path of profitability.

At Synchronous Solutions, we have decided to do something about this far too common circumstance. We have decided to expand our powerful Synchronous Flow system, a system that has helped so many shops become far more profitable, into a process that not only helps companies out of the ditch but keeps them from getting into that ditch in the first place.

Let me introduce the Synchronous Flow Operating System, a comprehensive, end-to-end solution for managing and growing a fabricating shop. Whether you just had your first million-dollar year and are dreaming of five, or you are a twelve-million-dollar shop dreaming of fifty, we can help you build the systems, structures, the team, and talent, you need to get you there safely and profitably.

Synchronous Solutions has assembled a team with an unfair advantage. We have multiple experts with decades of experience

## Rick Phelps

### *Synchronous Solutions*

driving continuous improvement in manufacturing businesses. They speak LEAN Manufacturing and Six Sigma. We even have one native Japanese speaker who can translate Lean's unfortunate use of Japanese terms into English, and help you determine actions that actually make you money!

The Synchronous Solutions team doesn't just know how to use and teach the use of these continuous improvement tools — we also know how to build the systems to embed those improvements so the results can be replicated by all on your team, and how to wrap a management system around it all to enable you to not only sustain the gains, but build upon them as well.

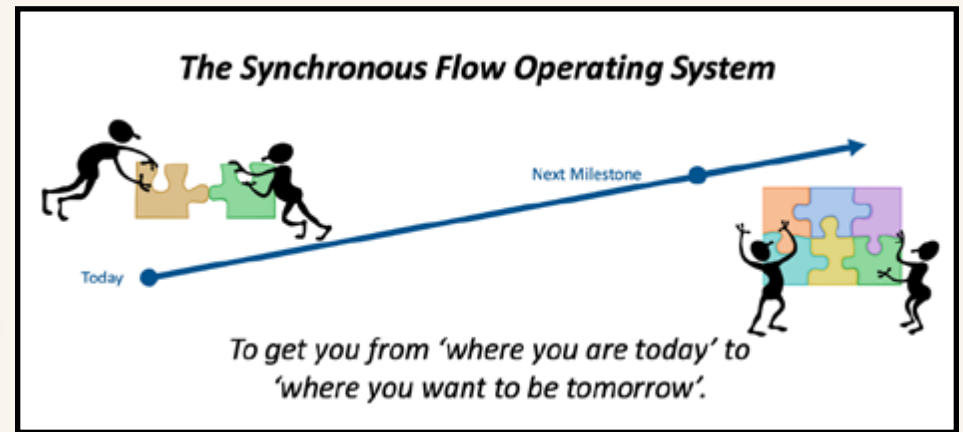
We don't just build the systems for you, we embed the knowledge of WHY and HOW to build those systems in your team, so that your team can not only maintain the systems, but they can constantly improve those systems.

### *Overview*

Systems are critical to the success of your business, and your systems are run by your team. If your team is not up to the task of maintaining and improving your systems as your business grows, trouble awaits. Every system will eventually break as you continue to grow. It is not sufficient to have great systems installed in your business, you have to have a great management team that has the capability to problem solve and improve those systems.

### *Growing Your Business and Growing Your team*

As you grow your business, you will need to grow your team, not just in size, but in capability. Here we have another unfair advantage. Synchronous Solutions has team members who are experts in organizational design and have helped numerous businesses build the organizational structure required to run the business AND identify the people in your organization capable of filling your top roles.



The Synchronous Flow Operating System is a collection of systems and structures that we help you craft and mold to meet YOUR organization's needs. Then we help you implement and train your team to run, manage, and improve those very structures and systems. Once you understand systems, it doesn't matter if it's your marketing system, your sales system, your production system, or your invoicing system. Our team will help you get the right people in the right roles doing the right work at the right time.

This is where our secret superpower comes into play. On top of decades of experience improving businesses, and decades of experience in the countertop industry, our superpower is focus. Our entire team are experts in the science of synchronous flow, the practical application of the concepts from Dr. Eli Goldratt's *Theory of Constraints*.

### *Connecting All Roles and Employees*

The Synchronous Flow Operating System explicitly connects every role and every individual in your company to the goal of the company — to make more money now and in the future. No other consulting group can help you connect the dots like we do. Every team member in your business will know how they connect to the success of your business and have a specific way to keep score. They will know how they are contributing to the success of your business, and know when they are winning and when they are not.

This is the secret to an engaged workforce: The ability to be successful at an individual level and feel success as an individual.

To connect the dots, your leadership team will need to meet regularly to get aligned and in sync on where the business is going. Synchronous Solutions will help you and your leadership team refine the direction you want the business to head annually. On

a quarterly basis we will guide the leadership team in checking progress and making course corrections, until they can navigate on their own. On a monthly basis, every manager will need to learn how to meet with their team to ensure every one's objective and score are aligned with their department's goals. Managers need to learn the skills of coaching and accountability to help every team member excel.

Every week the team assesses issues and opportunities, captures learnings, and focuses efforts on that which is most important. Every day the processes are monitored and exceptions requiring attention identified and assigned to an individual to be resolved, so potential issues don't become real problems that impact your clients.

Building a successful, profitable business is not rocket science, but it is science. You must have a clear understanding of where your business is today AND a clear picture of where you want it to be in three years, in one year, and at the end of next quarter. You then need to build the plans that will get you to your destination.

Mike Tyson said it well: "Everyone has a plan until they are punched in the face." Executing the plans is a constant fight. You take the first step, you measure, you get punched in the face, you learn, and you adjust to keep yourself on course. We are the guides, the coaches, the trainers, and the accountability partner in your corner, helping you get back up and fight when you get knocked down. Our goal is to help you make that journey safely and profitably in the least number of rounds.

*Rick Phelps is a Principal at [Synchronous Solutions LLC](#). Rick is an expert in Synchronous Flow, the practical application of Eli Goldratt's Theory of Constraints, and has been applying the philosophy and tools for over 40 years.*

# Dakota Mahogany: Core of the Continent

Continents don't come of age all at once. Rather, they are assembled, piece by piece, through the long process of plate tectonics. Every continent has a core – or a 'craton,' as geologists call it – that serves as its original landmass.

Onto this nucleus of a continent, new land carried along by plate tectonics eventually bumps into the craton, and becomes part of the new continent, growing it larger through successive collisions. Thus, most continents are oldest in the middle, with progressively younger parts added around the edges.

North America was 'born' about 3 billion years ago with the assembling of the Superior Province, which makes up the bedrock in south-central Canada and north-central United States. A sequence of five events each added a new piece of land, as the young continent gained the real estate that became Manitoba, Ontario, the Great Lakes Region, and northern Minnesota. The youngest part of the original North American craton is called the Minnesota River Valley terrane, which is a chunk of land that slid into the young North American continent around 2.6 billion years ago. At the time of this tectonic collision, Minnesota and the Dakotas were home to soaring mountain ranges as landmasses collided and pushed rocks upward.

Pressure and heat from the tectonic activity caused the bedrock to buckle and melt, creating liquid magma. Pockets of molten rock flowed upward within Earth's crust, but didn't reach the surface, so the magma didn't erupt like a volcano. Instead, these magma pools cooled slowly while still underground, forming crystals of feldspar, quartz, and dark mica. Western Minnesota contains several of these granite intrusions, and because geology has no concern for state lines, one lone spot of granite welled up in South Dakota, not far from the Minnesota border. This was the birth of the Dakota Mahogany Granite, in what is now Milbank, South Dakota.

The formation of Dakota Mahogany marks the last time the Midwest endured a tectonic collision. Since then, seas have advanced and retreated across the landscape, the continents have rearranged themselves in different parts of the globe,

by **Karin Kirk**

Reprinted from [usenaturalstone.com](http://usenaturalstone.com)

Graphics by *Karin Kirk*

Photos © *Michael Schultz and*

*Courtesy Dakota Granite*

and vast ice sheets grew, then melted, then grew again, over the course of several ice ages. After 2.6 billion years of erosion, the Midwest's former mountain ranges have been worn down, leaving the landscape mostly flat. Through all of this, Dakota Mahogany sat patiently, waiting for its day in the sun.

In 1925, the Dakota Granite Company was incorporated, and the stone began its second life.

## *'The Benchmark for Brown Granites'*

The trademark color of Dakota Mahogany has become recognizable around the world. It's made of three minerals: Brick red feldspar, grey smoky quartz, and black biotite mica. Taken together, the rich colors lend a deeper, weightier color than the light grey, tan, or pink hues that are more common for granite. The feldspar and quartz crystals are large enough to sparkle in the sun, and the stone holds a high gloss polish that will shine for decades.

Rick Dilts is the Marketing and Sales Manager of the Dakota Granite Company.



Early morning work at the quarry: extracting a block from the working face



Because geography has no concern for state lines, one lone spot of granite welled up in South Dakota, not far from the Minnesota border: Dakota Mahogany.

Below: Removing a fresh-cut block to processing.



Rick Dilts, Dakota Granite



and customized designs that celebrate and honor the memories of our loved ones.

For a stone as old and perseverant as Dakota, a memorial seems like the perfect application. "Just the longevity of it," says Dilts. "You look at concrete and how long that lasts compared to stone. Stone may cost a little bit more but in the long run it's going to cost much less if you use a natural product like stone." He muses, "Just look at the pyramids and consider how long they've been there."

## *Expanding the Palette*

The Dakota Granite company has been evolving and expanding, both in terms of the stone they quarry as well as how their stone is used. Beginning in the 1960s, the company started selling Dakota Mahogany blocks overseas, largely to Japan. Dilts recalls, "I was flying to China one year and walked into the restroom at the Narita airport, and from floor to the top of the walls were Dakota Mahogany. It was really cool to see that."

Dilts continues, "In about 1990 we purchased a couple more quarries," including another quarry that was already tapped into Dakota Mahogany, and a granite quarry just over the state line in Bellingham, Minnesota.

In 2021, Dakota Granite was bought by the same company that owns Kasota Stone, and the two became sister companies. This allowed Kasota's stones to become part of the palette of Dakota's offerings, and vice-versa.

*Please turn to page 15*

## 2023 NTCA Tile Person of the Year: Joe and Wendi Kerber



Dirk Sullivan presents Joe and Wendy Kerber with the 2023 Person of the Year award at the NTCA Awards ceremony, Coverings 2023.

National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA) presented its prestigious Tile Person of the Year award to Joe and Wendi Kerber of Kerber Tile, Marble & Stone at Coverings 2023 in Orlando, Fla. This award is given to individuals who have supported the goals and objectives established by the NTCA.

“Tile contracting companies are often family-owned businesses, and Joe and Wendi Kerber have successfully managed Kerber Tile and Marble & Stone together for many years,” said NTCA Executive Director Bart Bettiga. “They are the second husband and wife team to be honored by NTCA in our 76-year history, and they are truly deserving of this recognition.”

Joe Kerber has been a member of the NTCA Technical Committee and Methods and Standards Committee for many years and received a best practice award in 2015 for his work on language related to

membranes. He served two terms on the NTCA Board of Directors and is currently an Ambassador for the association. He is a Certified Tile Installer and Evaluator for the Ceramic Tile Education Foundation. Wendi Kerber is a CPA. In addition to managing the financial and tax planning for Kerber Tile, she has helped many local Minnesota tile contractors in this capacity.

The award was presented to the Kerbers at Coverings 2023 in Orlando, FL, by 2022 Tile Person of the Year Dirk Sullivan of Hawthorne Tile in Portland, Ore.

*NTCA is a trade association representing contracting and installation companies and associate supporters of ceramic tile, natural stone, tile and stone installation materials, and other tile-stone related products. Established in 1947 as the Southern Tile Contractors Association (STCA), it became the National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA) in 1988, reflecting its membership expansion to a national landscape.*

*NTCA is dedicated to the professional installation of ceramic tile and natural stone is recognized for its leadership role in training, education, and standards development.*

“Everyone who’s ever taken a shower has an idea. It’s the person who gets out of the shower, dries off and does something about it who makes a difference.”

— Nolan Bushnell

## Why Fabricators Should “Systemize the Predictable”

Whenever someone mentions building out processes for your company, many managers get a look of terror in their eyes and run for cover, thinking about 500-page SOP manuals and nitpicking every single detail of their operation. But streamlining your shop doesn’t have to be so painful, or inefficient!

One of the best ideas about building processes comes from Gino Wickman, the creator of the **Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS)**. It’s amazing, so prepare yourself! Ready?

**“Systemize the predictable, so you can humanize the exceptional.”**

Let that sink in. Yes, there will be some “nitpicking” to create standard operating procedures but, according to Wickman, you don’t have to systemize *everything* — like that process-developing nightmare going on in your head right now.

**Let’s break down the quote to really get to the genius behind it. What the heck does that mean!?**

The basic goal behind EOS is to optimize your company’s productivity. And one of the core components of EOS is process.

Countertop fabricators at every level know the importance of doing processes the same way every time. It maintains quality, ensures efficiency, and reduces reworks. The part that makes everyone want to doze off is building multi-page SOPs that nobody wants to read. Where does one even find the time?

When Wickman says, “*Systemize the predictable, so you can humanize the exceptional,*” he’s breaking your processes down into two parts: the predictable, and the unpredictable. In the same vein, let’s break down the quote into two pieces.

### **Systemize the Predictable...**

There are plenty of processes in your countertop fabrication operation that you know forwards and backwards. There aren’t any surprises. You and your team know exactly what’s going to happen at every step. These are your predictable processes.

For example, a great predictable process in a countertop fabrication shop is preparing a customer for their template

**Katherine Gifford**  
*Moraware*



appointment. This should be done the same way each time with little to no variation.

Because you know exactly what’s coming next in the process, it’s easy to see the steps and turn them into a handy SOP for everyone on your team to follow. If you can easily predict the process, that’s where you should spend your time Systemizing.

### **...So you can Humanize the Exceptional**

There’s one computer in your shop that can think creatively and solve problems better and faster than anything in the world, and everyone in your shop has access to it: the human brain! When you think about people as a whole, we’re pretty smart. Let the most advanced supercomputer ever built do its job!

When you only systemize your predictable, core processes (and not everything), you leave room for you and your team to use your brains. For shop workers, that might be identifying more efficient ways to fabricate countertops. For salespeople, perhaps they can spend more time with their customers and showcase their money-making personalities. Managers can spend more time learning about their employees and building a positive work environment. You might even be able to identify opportunities your SOP-happy competitors might have missed.

Massive SOPs that attempt to control every minute aspect of the operation only lock people in boxes.

*Please turn to page 16*

# Dakota Mahogany

[Continued from page 13](#)

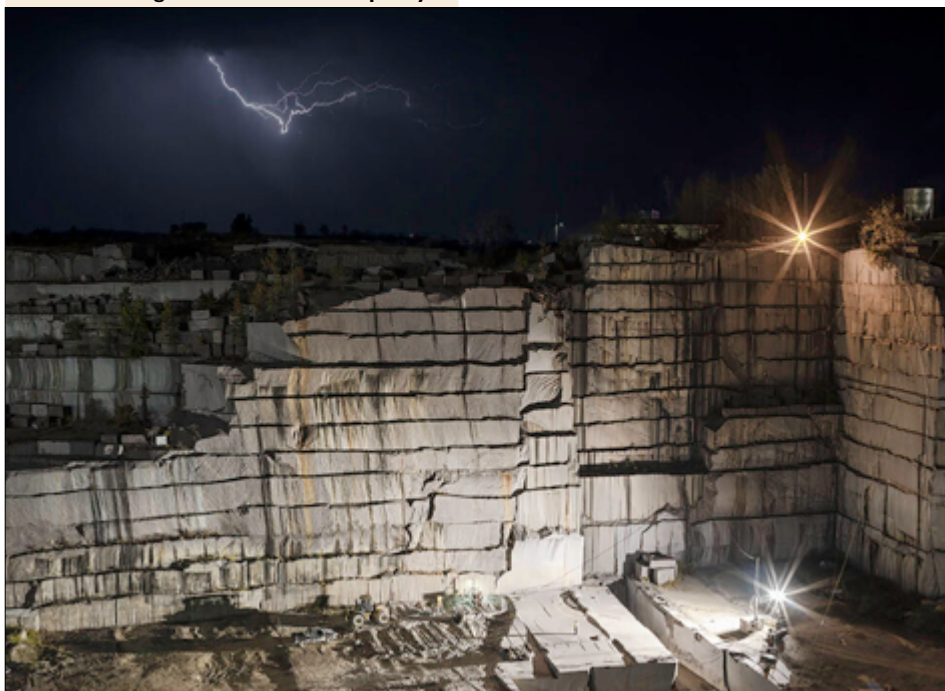
But the relationship runs deeper than simply selling the same stones; both companies share a business philosophy called the Entrepreneurial Operating System. Two managers from Kasota have moved over to Dakota to help grow the business: Jake Barkley and Colin Kimball. To say that Barkley and Kimball have passion for their work is an understatement. The pair appear to radiate energy and drive, especially as they play off each other and Dilts as they describe their roles in the company and plans for the future.

Kimball describes his job as “The Integrator,” as he ties together the people and departments throughout the company. “I’ve learned a lot from a lot of really great people,” he says. “And I’m proud to be a part of a big team out in Milbank.”

Barkley is the visionary—planning the broad strategy and direction. “My role is basically to set the course or the vision for the company,” he says.

The management team is sharply focused on growth, but not simply for growth’s sake. Every business decision centers around the company’s core values. A key component of this strategy is to invest in and empower their employees. “As you start to center your culture around core values, it helps attract talented people to come work with us,” says Barkley. “And it helps us coach our people as well.”

The working face of the Dakota quarry.



## The ‘Wow’ Factor


A focus on people is an especially wise practice in a rural location, where hiring and retaining employees can be an ongoing challenge. “It’s a very rural community so Dakota Granite is one of the larger employers,” says Dilts.

Milbank has a population of around 3,500 people and is two hours from the nearest commercial airport. In this region, one can’t simply hire workers with specialized skills – the workforce needs to be cultivated over time.

Dilts explains, “We don’t live in one of the granite centers of the country. So we pretty much have to train everybody. We’ve been lucky enough to find a few hand polishers that came from the counter-top industry. But as far as stonecutters go, I don’t know if we’ve ever found somebody with that experience.”

But this is where the company’s people-centered approach gives them a leg up on hiring. Dilts observes, “We’ve got a really good reputation for how we treat our employees and I think that’s helped us draw in a lot of excellent people and retain them.” He continues, “We have one family, their fifth generation is working here now. Isn’t that amazing?”

Dakota Granite has a staff of around 93 workers, working year-round in the quarries, as well as in the cutting, carving, and polishing of finished pieces.



## Dakota Mahogany Granite

Milbank, SD

**Quarried by:**  
Dakota Granite Company

**Colors:**


- Brick red to rich brown, with flecks of black mica.
- Available in three variations of color and pattern.

**Products:**  
Blocks, slabs, custom fabrication

**Applications:**  
Monuments, headstones, mausoleums, benches, signs, fountains, and building interiors and exterior surfaces

**American to the core:**

- 2.6 billion years old
- Part of the original core, or “craton” of the North American continent



American stones series

Graphic by Karin Kirk  
Background image © Dakota Granite  
used with permission

Production work is done part by machine, and part by hand, and the company pairs high-tech CNC machines with timeless handwork.

Kimball appreciates the contrast between humans and machines. “We have a robot that can make these beautiful parts. And then we have true artisans that are making really beautiful parts by hand. To see the progression from what people can do by hand and what we can do with a piece of equipment is amazing.” He adds, “It’s fun to be a part of.”

Barkley confirms that skilled handwork is irreplaceable: “Yeah, a lot of the hand cutting with hammer and chisel has to happen by hand to get a beautiful finish. It’s a special thing. You can’t replicate it.”

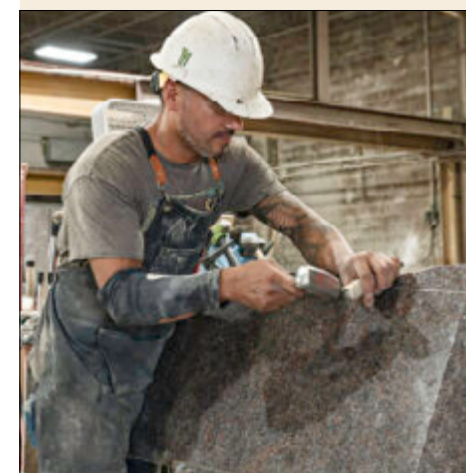
“There’s something extremely rewarding for people when they finish a beautiful part,” says Kimball. “I see guys and gals taking pictures with their phones of the work that they did.” Working with stone invokes a sense of permanence that can be hard to find in an era where too much seems disposable. Kimball derives deep satisfaction not just for himself, but for his employees: “To be proud of what you do at work every day and to know that you’re a part of something that’s gonna last for hundreds of years.”

“There’s so much ‘wow factor’ in our plant and our quarry,” says Dilts, echoing Kimball’s pride. “But watching the stonecutters is a big highlight for me. It’s just so fascinating to watch those guys hit that chisel with their hammer every time

and not their hand.” Dilts laughs, continuing, “I’ve tried it. That doesn’t work very good for me.” Barkley and Kimball join in the laughter as Dilts continues, “But you know, the team is so good at what they do. It’s just so fun to watch them.”

[Please turn to page 17](#)

Hand-finishing a chiseled monument edge.



## BACA Systems Fabrication Seminar to Showcase Equipment Demos and Industry Insights

**BACA** Systems, a leading provider of fabrication and manufacturing solutions, is excited to host its upcoming Fabrication Seminar on June 22, 2023, at The Countertop Factory Midwest facility in Addison, IL just outside of Chicago. The event will offer live demonstrations of the company's latest equipment and bring together industry experts who will share their knowledge and insights on fabrication.

Attendees will have the chance to learn about the latest industry trends, network with peers and experts, and gain valuable insights into improving productivity and profitability. The seminar will feature presentations on the latest advancements in the industry and offer practical tips on how to maximize productivity and profitability.

In addition, BACA Systems will showcase its state-of-the-art machinery, demonstrating its capabilities and how it can help businesses achieve better results, increase efficiency, and reduce costs.

Live Demonstrations will include the Robo SawJet – Robotic SawJet and the Miter X – Dedicated Miter Saw.

Other presentations will include:

- Robo SawJet M Series – Robotic SawJet with Mitering Capability
- BBM Paladin – CNC Router
- Straight 8 – Line Polisher
- PURE – Water Filtration Systems
- Tite-Rack – Semi-Automatic and Automatic Storage Systems

- Auto Cut Line - Automated Fabrication Line
- SpeedLabel – Software for Labeling & Tracing Parts
- No Lift Install System Installation Carts
- E-Template – Laser Digital Measuring System
- ISFA - The International Surface Fabricators Association

“We are thrilled to host this seminar and provide a platform for professionals to come together and learn about the latest trends in fabrication,” said Chuck Russo, CEO of BACA Systems. “Our goal is to empower attendees with the knowledge they need to improve their processes and drive innovation in their businesses.”

By attending the seminar, participants can expect to gain numerous benefits, including insights into the latest industry trends and advancements from industry experts, the chance to network with peers and experts in the field, gain valuable insights into how to improve fabrication processes and increase productivity and profitability, and learn about the latest equipment and how it can benefit their businesses.

To register for the upcoming seminars, visit <https://www.bacasystems.com/events/>. For more information about the Fabrication Seminar, please contact BACA Systems at [info@baca-systems.com](mailto:info@baca-systems.com) or call +1 (855) 847-7330.

“When someone lays a guilt trip on you for being successful, remember that your guilt is some politician’s license to take what you worked for and give it to someone else who is more likely to vote for the politician who plays Santa Claus with your money.”

– Thomas Sowell

## Why Fabricators Should “Systemize the Predictable”

*Continued from page 14*

If you have the greatest computer ever made at your disposal, why would you want to put limits on it? When you systemize only the predictable, it gives you space to humanize the exceptional and take your business to the next level.

### *Tips to help you systemize the predictable at your countertop fabrication business*

Saying one big fancy quote from some entrepreneurial expert sounds great, but how do you take the words and put them into action at your countertop fabrication business? Here are a few tips to help you systemize the predictable, so you can humanize the exceptional:

#### • *Identify your core processes.*

We’ve all seen SOP documents that cover hundreds of processes and fill entire binders (or even filing cabinets), but how many processes are really essential for your business to operate? If your operation is like most businesses, there are likely only a few key processes that keep the wheels turning. These are your Core Processes, and they’re the only ones you should focus on systematizing.

Take some time to identify your Core Processes. It’s not unheard of for some companies to have as few as six core processes! A lot of folks tend to overcomplicate their processes and then as you grow, it is scary to look at them. Talk about chaos...

#### • *Document and simplify core processes*

Once you know the Core Processes that make your little countertop world go ‘round, it’s time to document. Yes, it’s time for the fun part!

Get out your pen and paper, and write out your core processes step by step. Focus on the predictable parts of the processes, just like the quote says.

When you have your SOP written from top to bottom, simplify it. You want your systems to be as simple as possible. Record only the major steps of the process that have to happen in order to achieve consistent, quality results.

Many businesses can simplify their Core Processes into about 1-3 pages. You want

**20% of your business processes produce 80% of the results.**

your SOPs to be simple, clear, and easy to follow.

#### • *Follow the 20/80 rule*

It’s a common belief in the business world that 20% of the people do 80% of the work. While that may or may not be true, Wickman likes to apply the 20/80 rule to your processes. He says that **20% of your business processes produce 80% of the results.**

Focus most of your systematizing energy on the 20% of your processes and leave the rest to “humanizing.” It’ll have the largest impact on your business and still leave 80% of your business processes open to creativity and exceptional thought. That’s the true way to create SOPs that are efficient, effective, and don’t drive everyone in your shop absolutely nuts!

#### *So where do you start now?*

The first step to any form of organizing your business is to look at the way you are currently doing things. Ask yourself “What is working?” and “What is not working?” We also like to ask the folks that come to us for a demo, “What is the cost of not changing?”

If your answers to those questions lead you to believe that you could use some process organizing and streamlining of those said processes, check out the Moraware software that is quite literally called **Systemize**. *How fun is that?* Moraware job management and scheduling software allows thousands of fabricators to use their creativity to keep improving the way they run their business all the way from quoting to install.

*Katherine Gifford is the Marketing Manager at Moraware. Visit her blog at [www.moraware.com](http://www.moraware.com).*



## IMS Partners with Cape Fear Manufacturing Partnership to Build Future Workforce



Looking to attract high school students to the wide diversity of career paths in manufacturing as an alternative to four years of college, the Cape Fear Manufacturing Partnership (CFMP) was created to help train, develop and match talented students with the manufacturing base in Southeastern North Carolina. Drawn by the mission of the group and how it could affect the stone, glass, wood and aerospace industries, representatives from IMS USA recently attended the group's first high school job fair.

"We are impressed with the Partnership commitment in reducing the distance among companies that share the same interests, goals, needs," said Emanuele Porro, IMS USA CEO. "Being more involved in the local manufacturing community is part of our process of growth in the Wilmington area."

Although IMS USA does not manufacture in Wilmington and they do not face the same issues as the manufacturers, they do know that keeping the industries' workforce strong is important to the group as that directly impacts their own business.

"IMS USA is proud to support the Cape Fear Manufacturing Partnership and their initiative to showcase the manufacturing communities' opportunities to the next generation," said Wayne Rush, National Sales Manager for IMS USA.

The CFMP is a group of almost 50 local manufacturers in the area that came together to address some of the common issues faced by all. Chief among those issues is the attraction and retention of staff for the various industries. A variety of on-going initiatives are geared toward changing the conversation about manufacturing jobs in this country and making people aware of the career

possibilities companies like theirs offer. Among those initiatives are career fairs and making regular appearances at schools and other events centered around manufacturing themes.

"One thing I'm particularly proud of is our Manufacturing Summer Camp Program, kicking off at all three regional Community Colleges (Cape Fear, Brunswick and Southeastern) this coming summer," said James Flock, MA Group, one of the leading members of CFMP. "We also work with the colleges in designing training programs for current and incoming staff, among other things."

Specializing in landing gear for the aerospace industry, the MA Group manufactures sophisticated and technically demanding landing gear components for both military and commercial aircraft at their Leland, NC facility.

"These components require a great deal of skill and training to manufacture, and MA Group is very aware of the obstacles we face in finding talent," said Flock. "The company is extremely supportive of my activities on behalf of the Partnership."

For more information, visit the CFMP's website: [www.capefearmfg.com](http://www.capefearmfg.com).

*IMS USA is a specialized distributor of tool holders for CNC machines used by stone, glass, wood, aluminum, plastic and metal fabricators. In business since 2009 and offering one of the most complete CNC tool holder, accessories and components inventories in North America, their main focus is to help customers get the product they want in the shortest time possible. For more information, visit [imsusanc.com](http://imsusanc.com), and [facebook.com/imsusa/](https://facebook.com/imsusa/).*

## Dakota Mahogany

*Continued from page 15*

### Bright-Eyed Planning for the Future

As Diltz, Kimball, and Barkley look ahead, they're helping the company expand its focus into architectural work, including municipal projects and outdoor spaces.

Barkley describes a current focus on landscape stone. Dakota's current projects include "substantial outdoor infrastructure" where people can "walk in and around park-like spaces and get up close and personal to the stone," say Barkley. He notes that the use of natural stone in outdoor spaces is a trend that's been gaining momentum.

But even the most inspired designs can still get bogged down in today's business environment, and Kimball explains how planning ahead is more important than ever. "On the back end of the pandemic it's changed a lot of our behavior and our strategy. You used to be able to pick up the phone and get a few spare parts quickly from Amazon." But supply chain bottlenecks, shipping delays, and staffing shortages have changed the nature of project management. "We're doing a lot more in-depth planning. We're preparing more for the future. We're having more conversation around what potential pitfalls are around the next corner. I think it's changed our behavior in a positive way. We now take a more realistic look at some of the obstacles that may occur and how to overcome them when we run into them."

The company's local quarries offer a simple, domestic supply chain that keeps

Polished Dakota Mahogany granite



lead times short. In a competitive marketplace, "perhaps our shorter lead times and the availability of our products are what's helping fuel our growth," says Barkley. "Some of our customers are getting quotes for lead times that are three or four times what ours is. So I think that is leading to some pretty substantial order increases."

Dakota Mahogany has been waiting 2.6 billion years for the right opportunity. The quarry is in good hands, with stewards who are eager to shepherd the stone to its best use. "We're in a pattern of what I would consider extreme growth," says Barkley. "So we're going to continue to grow this business until the next hurdle arrives. Then we'll solve that problem, whatever it is."

*Karin Kirk is a geologist and science educator with over 20 years of experience and brings a different perspective to the stone industry. Karin is a regular contributor to [usenaturalstone.com](http://usenaturalstone.com) and the Slippery Rock Gazette. Contact her at [karinkirk@gmail.com](mailto:karinkirk@gmail.com).*



## Juice Jacking

**Sharon Koehler**

*Stone Industry Consultant*

IT used to be, back in the day when cell phones and other electronics weren't carried around with us, everywhere, it was hard to find public charging ports. Now, you can find them everywhere. Hotel lobbies, bars, airports, coffee shops, restaurants, hair salons and who knows where else – are all offering charging. They make it easy and convenient. Pull your charger out of your purse, pocket, briefcase, backpack or anywhere else you keep it, and just plug up and start charging. Problem solved.

You can work a little during flight layovers or read a book while waiting for your dinner companion. Answer emails while you sit tight in a hotel lobby or get a little work done waiting for your friends to meet you at the local coffee shop. Public charging allows us to do more in places we never thought we could before.

Convenient, right? No worries, right?

WRONG! There is an expression that says, "Just because you can, doesn't mean you should." Sure, you are perfectly capable of pulling out your charger and plugging your device into that public charging port – but should you? NO, say many security experts!

Scammers, hackers, and thieves have figured out ways to load malware into these public charging ports. Then, when you plug in your device to charge, the malware will either lock up your device, possibly making you a target for a ransomware attack, or the malware will attach itself to your device, mining and collecting your personal data, sending it back to the scammers, hackers, and thieves for them to use as they see fit! (Which will not be good for you!)

There are things you can do to protect

**There are hidden risks in using public charging ports. Know how to protect your data and yourself.**

yourself from being "Juice Jacked." The first one is obvious: don't plug into public charging ports. However, if you must charge a device in public, these tips can help prevent issues:

- When you plug into a port, if you get an option on your device to trust this computer, share data or charge only, **ALWAYS pick charge only.** This prevents data sharing.
- Purchase a charge-only cable. A charge only cable prevents data from being sent or received to or from your device.
- If your device allows wireless charging, carry a wireless charger, and use that instead of plugging in.

- Should your device not allow wireless charging, carry a portable battery pack you can plug into your device and then charge that when needed.

- Instead of using a public charging port, carry an A/C adapter and plug into a wall socket instead.

- Invest in a USB data blocker aka juice-jacker defender to prevent data breaches to your device.

Now, all of a sudden, you remember you used public charging last week and you are wondering if you got juice jacked. There are signs to look for that might let you know if malware has been installed on your device.

- Apps are taking forever to load.
- You are seeing more pop-up ads than usual.
- You have an unexplained jump in your data usage.
- Your device is operating slower than normal.

*[Please turn to page 24](#)*

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## Stone Restoration and Maintenance Corner

### Hand Tools Revisited

Quite frequently, the hardest part of most any stone restoration project is the hand tool work. Doing the edge work on a floor is certainly an arduous task. And, in many cases, the most experienced person on the project is the one who must do it, so that it gets done right. This gets even more complicated when there is lippage that



Adding finishing touches on a marble vanity using an older Flex 302.

requires removal and or the stone is black or dark-colored. It is essential that the floor blends well with the edges.

Doing countertops successfully also requires an experienced technician. When honing with diamonds, being only a few degrees off angle of the surface can cause the countertop to end up with a distinctive circular scratch pattern. Of course, these scratches must be rectified, before the top can be completed. Unfortunately, when the unwanted scratch pattern becomes visible is after you have finished the final polishing step.

Now that we have addressed how difficult using a hand tool properly can be, let's throw in using a hand tool on a vertical surface, like a shower wall. Hopefully, honing with diamond discs will not be required for your vertical project, although I have seen

**Bob Murrell**

*M3 Technologies*

*Photos by Bob Murrell*

it be necessary many times. Keeping the diamond disc flat on the surface to avoid the unwanted honing scratch pattern can be quite difficult, and what's worse, the operator fatigues quickly in this scenario.

There are many issues when working with a hand tool, such as water supply and management. I like to use a small garden pump-up sprayer – one that is bigger than a regular spray bottle, but not too heavy, either. Pump-up sprayers also release water continuously when well-pumped (pressurized). I have used a steady water supply (spigot and garden hose) when more water is necessary, like for a center water-feed (through-the-spindle) tool. Center water-feed tools need the water or the seals may burn up. Safety tip: never operate a through-the-spindle water-fed tool dry!

Of course, when you are using water, this can create quite a mess, so proper masking and draping of surrounding areas becomes



Here I'm using a small pump-up sprayer as the water source for refinishing an antique marble vanity top.

necessary. I suggest that everyone get some 4 foot x 8 foot sections of foam board insulation. I take the 4 x 8 sheet and score it (just cut the skin) so that it will fold to about a 140 (degree) angle and will stand on its own. Once scored, use red polyvinyl tape to secure the scored area. Use these foldable sheets to protect adjacent areas when doing countertops, tables, and vanities. They can be easily hosed down at the end of the day and will last quite a while.

You will also need to use "Tape & Drape" masking plastic for cabinets and



This is my typical setup for doing edge work. Notice the mechanic's "creeper" cart – a must-have accessory to save your knees when doing edge and lippage work.

your machine getting hot, turn it off immediately and check the extension cord size and all connections.

There are many accessories available for your hand tool, provided that the machine has features standard to our industry. The tool needs to have a spindle that is 5/8-inch diameter with 11 threads per inch (commonly called 5/8" x 11). This size spindle is what the industry and all of the stone restoration products supply companies, like M3 Technologies and BB Industries, is geared for. Pretty much all of the accessories like pad drivers, Velcro diamond drivers, core bits, diamond cup wheels and many other tool set-ups are all designed around the 5/8" x 11 spindle. There are a few exceptions like a 20mm spindle, but I prefer to stay with the 5/8" x 11.

other adjacent areas that will need both water and chemical protection. You will also need blue painter's tape and the red polyvinyl tape for additional protection and securing of plastic Tape & Drape.

An extension cord will be necessary for most hand tool operations. Be sure to use one that is water resistant and also of ample gauge (diameter of wire) so as not to cause too much amperage draw on the hand tool. Excessive heating of the hand tool motor will result from using an insufficiently-sized extension cord. Overheating will ultimately shorten the life of the motor. The longer the extension cord, the bigger the gauge the cord needs to be. I would say a 25-foot cord should be at least a 14 gauge. If you need an extension cord longer than 50 feet, then you should probably be looking at a 12 gauge wire. If you feel

In the stone restoration industry, we mostly use slow speed operation, so your machine will need to be able to go below 1,000 rpm and preferably down to at least 600 rpm. Remember, you will be slinging water and slurry everywhere. Also, with faster rpms (1,000 rpm and higher), you would definitely need a center water-feed tool to keep the diamond properly lubricated and clean. Polishing with 5X and other powders or compounds is a slow speed operation, period. Diamonds can be run slow or somewhat faster, but you must be able to keep the water flowing under the diamond while in use.

[Please turn to page 23](#)



Refinishing a table top on site, and using foam board insulation walls and blue tape to protect the surrounding area.



Lippage work on Tennessee Pink marble using an ELF Flexible Metal mounted on a Makita grinder.

## Take Action with Your Cash Flow

“There’s a 95-pound man with 160 million dollars behind this door.” That’s Danny Ocean, leading man of the “Oceans” movie series, talking to one of his crew members as their heist reaches its culmination and they’re unable to get on the other side of the door at the end of Oceans 11. But does it also sound like it could be you, talking about your slab yard, or your mounting pile of unpaid invoices? Though you’ve stayed on the right side of the law whereas Danny tended to resort to more nefarious tactics, the notion that you’ve done a lot of work to get to the culmination of a project and all the money is just sitting on the other side of a door isn’t all that dissimilar. So, is there a way to maximize your ability to get all that money flowing through your business? While it’d be difficult to offer up a definite “yes”, three areas of note will make it far more likely you’re getting the proverbial 160 million dollars out from behind the door on every job you do. Let’s call these areas **P-I-C** and examine them here.

### Processes

The stone industry, perhaps more than most industries, demands that a process be followed. Without each step of the process laid out with some level of intentionality, there are too many variables to track and not miss steps. There’s the time a job can take with the back and forth between the customers on what color they want, and the back and forth between the job site and the shop; all of that back and forth can mean the job can drag out for months from start to finish, which in turn allows for more time to forget a step in the process. But if you set your process up in a way that consistently has one step after the other (i.e. sending an invoice one or two days after install, or even before if you’re really getting serious about cash flow), nothing should be glossed over, regardless of how long a job takes from quote to installation. Another step in the process that will help ensure cash flow is capturing client signatures on documents and order forms (maybe right after a template), which will allow the job to proceed without unnecessary callbacks and other potential hang-ups. Building steps into your process that account for cash to come into your business, and then assigning those steps to dedicated personnel will create the

### Josiah Vander Maas *ActionFlow*

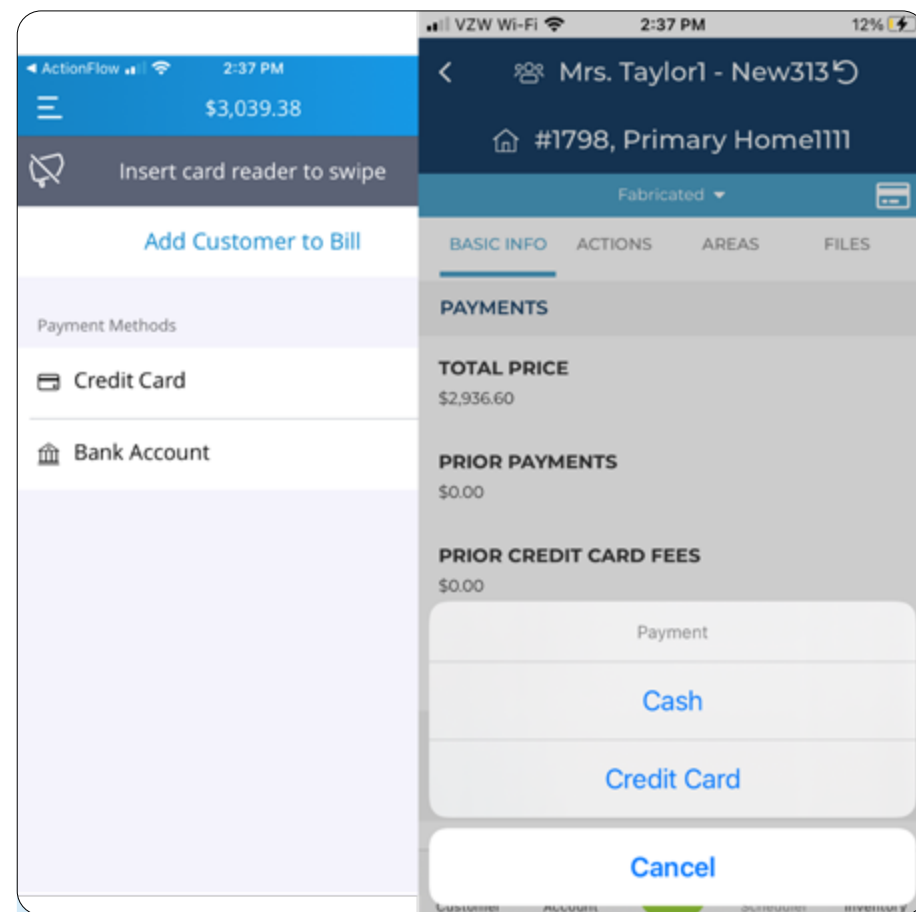
appropriate checks and balances necessary to ensure that amidst the programming, cutting, hand-fabbing and loading onto a truck, you’re getting paid.

### Inventory

Anything on the lot is cash, and unlike being held hostage by a reluctant customer or a builder who’s 43 days in on his Net 30 payment terms (more on this later), you control the money spent on inventory. Inventory is where much of your cash is tied up, and there are a couple of ways you can more effectively ensure you turn those slabs to cash and not leave money out in the rain (in the case of remnants). Most notably, if cash flow is limited right now, it may make sense to make a conscious effort not to over order material. Over-ordering does allow you to tell your customers about “the area’s largest inventory selection,” but it also leaves you exposed to the reality that the longer that inventory sits on your lot, the more restricted your cash flow becomes. Tracking data on popular colors and materials allows you to buy slabs you know will sell quickly to generate positive cash flow, and reduce the likelihood of slabs collecting dust in your yard. Prioritizing inventory management and making an effort to sell those items that have seemingly taken up permanent residence on your lot will tremendously aid in your pursuit of a healthier cash flow.

### Collection

Finally, there’s the act of collecting the money itself. The changing of hands, the monetary exchange, whatever you want to call it – it’s the moment that matters most to every for-profit business. And so, because it is the inflection point (or “points,” since in countertop businesses there is a need to generally accept a deposit and final payment), multiple tactics have been employed. Traditionalists adhere to cash or check, while others utilize digital money transfers and credit card payments, and still others do a little bit of everything, though it’s probably safe to say for now that cryptocurrency is off the table as a viable cash flow option. Nevertheless, options exist and it’s up to you to maximize your cash flow by



Customer transactions made easy. You can either send an online link or use the mobile app (shown above) in the showroom.

exploring which of those options makes sense for what you’re doing. Additionally, as alluded to earlier, payment terms can have an impact on cash flow. Now, it’s perfectly normal and, in most cases the industry standard, to give Net 30 or maybe even 60 day terms to builders/contractors you do business with regularly. However, those decisions ought to be made selectively, and in the case of ongoing missed payments it may be wise to readjust your terms with that contractor. Lastly, if you find yourself doing an outsized proportion of commercial work and haven’t implemented any sort of progress billing, that ought to be considered as a way to generate cash flow while jobs are still ongoing.

At the end of the day, cash and cash flow can separate a healthy business from one that could stand to make improvements, and that can have trickledown effects. Frustration can manifest itself in different ways for customers, employees and leadership alike when cash flow dries up, so what is there to do? Well, for starters, consider the topics discussed here. Maybe start by addressing your inventory problem or where in your process you send out an invoice? Maybe it’s re-evaluating the

all-important payment collection method. An ERP (enterprise resource planning) software like ActionFlow, one such solution that is specifically designed for the stone industry, can address all of these areas of concern in a variety of ways. From a built-in payment collection system (ActionPay) to robust inventory management tools and reports, systems like ActionFlow exist to enhance your cash flow. Since starting with ActionPay, a stone shop recently reported 100% of their jobs as being paid in full prior to installation, and even 40% of those jobs being paid up before fabrication. Their owner had this to say about the service, “Our office manager was initially hesitant to use something new, but after a week she was converted, sharing, “This is amazing, we already have all our installs collected going into next week.”

So, if you find yourself like Danny, with a boatload of money “behind a door,” know that solutions do exist, and you can turn your hard work into a consistent cash flow.

For more information about ActionFlow and ActionPay visit [www.actionflow.net/solutions/process-development-automation/actionpay/](http://www.actionflow.net/solutions/process-development-automation/actionpay/).

## Great Minds Think Alike – Doesn't that Mean Idiots Do, Too?

ON occasion, I've wondered if owning a countertop business didn't qualify me for elite-level status in the idiot group. The countertop business is capital intensive, breakage typically means working for free, customers are picky, margins can be thin, and finding talented people for jobs that require significant physical labor only seems to be getting harder. Any of this sound familiar? Well, you're not alone. What follows is a humbling personal story of my struggle operating a business and an unforgettable "Aha!" moment that helped me spend less time in the idiot group (a.k.a. frustrated and stressed) and begin scoring more of the wins gained by those in the "great minds" group. Read along as I share my introduction to the term EOS, (Entrepreneurial Operating System) and the significance those three letters had on my business and life. It's my sincere hope that this could make a difference for you as well. Here's how it began.

There's always been this goal in my head to get to the point where someone makes a snap judgment about my life and business and says, "Must be rough!" All the while thinking if they only knew! Heck, if I only knew what I was in for, would I have even started this journey? Many times, the answer to that question has been "no." Face it, there's no school to prepare us for what we do, and even though most of us have some sense of how to make money, none of us could fathom the breadth of skills needed to build and run a business until we do it. From fabrication skills to insurance audits, to machine purchases, to payroll, there are 1,000 different things that come at us from 1,000 different directions! It can be overwhelming even for the hardest of us. If there's a one size fits all manual that tells us how to do it, I could never find it, and I couldn't help but wonder if it was this hard for everyone else. Thoughts like these led to more frustration, but not everything was bad. It was evident that my fabrication skills were good as I had a great reputation and little problem finding work. The challenge was getting it all done, keeping the bills paid and having a life worth living. To go along with that there was a list of nagging questions that I couldn't answer.

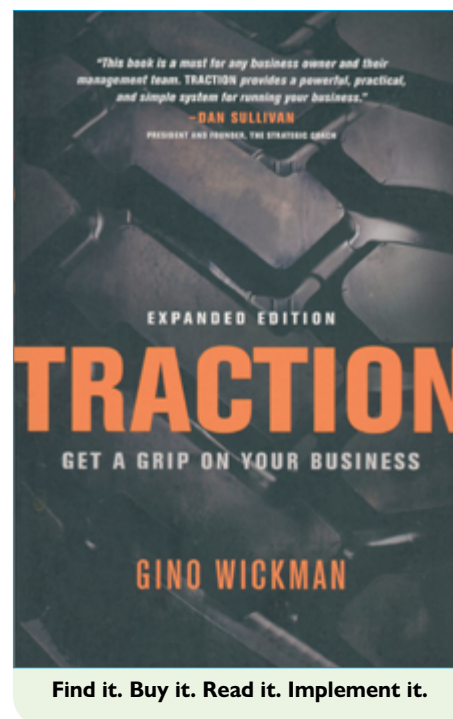
Why was my company hitting the sales ceiling of only 2 million dollars? Why

**Eric Rolseth**

*Stone Fabricator's Alliance*

couldn't I grow beyond 14 employees? Why is delegating so hard, and if I want something done right, do I really have to do it myself? Business author John Maxwell addresses situations like these with what he calls the "Law of the Lid," which states, "Leadership ability is the lid that determines a person's level of effectiveness." Simply meaning that as the owner, leader, and ultimate authority in my business, I was responsible for holding it back and I was the "lid." Therein lies the problem that we all have at some level whether it be 2 million, or 20 million. Even if we understand that we are the "Lid", how do we correct that?

Determined to find the answer I joined a peer group of 12 business owners. Turns out we had a lot in common – a group of frustrated lunatics riding the highs and lows of owning and growing a business. We quickly became friends. It was in the group that I recognized the need for a coach and hired one for \$200/hr. He was scheduled to visit my shop every other week for 2 hours per visit, and after the first session of getting acquainted, he asked me to read a book he thought would help me, by Gino Wickman: *Traction: Get A Grip On Your Business*. You may think I would have simply complied, but this irritated me a bit as I wanted him to give me the answers, not force me to find them. So, I defied any sense of logic and spent the next 2-hour session and \$400 arguing with a successful business owner and coach about the need to read a \$14 book. Talk about irony! What an absurd way to start. The saving grace was that at that precise moment I was feeling overwhelmed and desperate. I was like a drowning swimmer who a lifeguard can't save until they're so exhausted they stop flailing about, which could potentially drown them both. I stopped resisting and listened to the audiobook. Turns out the book is fantastic, and I searched for places that needed driving to just so I could listen to it over the next few days! In hindsight, I must have spent a lot of time daydreaming while listening to it, because I missed a LOT, which is demonstrated in the story that follows.



One of the first things the coach had me do from the book was to determine what my core values were. At the time I thought mission statements and cores values were all a bunch of blah-blah BS – worthless business jargon that didn't apply to the real-world problems of unreasonable customers and uncaring employees I was dealing with. I got riled up thinking about wasting time on core values, so I did what any pigheaded business owner would do and argued with the coach for two months while he tried to get my core values defined and in writing. "Yes, I love the book, but let's skip this part," I'd say, and move on. My coach wouldn't have it. It took five meetings, and \$2,000 down the drain, but he persisted and pulled it out of me. He was relentless, and I thank God for that now. At the beginning of meeting number 6, he asked me for my core values. I returned to my notes and shared the four core values and their definitions as written in my own frustrated words.

**Character** – If you lie, cheat, steal, manipulate, throw temper tantrums, you don't have the character to be around me.

**Teamwork** – If Momma didn't teach you to play nice with others, you can't be around me.

**Service** – I have an almost overwhelming need to take care of my customers and employees, alike. If you don't care when customers or your fellow workers aren't being properly treated, you can't be around me.

**Pioneer** – I'm an inventor and there is a certain level of chaos and change associated with this. It also forces change which is sometimes substantial. If change drives you crazy, I'll drive you crazy. You won't be happy around me.

After that, coach handed me a notepad and said quickly write down the last ten people you've had to terminate. He pushed me to do it fast and not overthink it. After completing that he said next to each person's name write the core value they violated. Doing this part was stunningly easy! Alongside each name was a core value, or multiple core values, that had been so obviously broken I couldn't deny it. This was my "Aha" moment, and it struck me almost like a physical slap. Up to that point I'd paid no attention to someone's core values during the hiring process, and it showed. Yes, we had some talented people, but we were a disjointed group. Imagine 14 people on a boat and each rowing when they wanted, which direction they wanted, and whatever rowing style they thought best. The captain, me, was the visionary who hadn't communicated my vision to each person on the boat, and confirmed that they both knew it and were capable of rowing in the way needed of them. If the picture you get of this ship in your head is a bit chaotic, I can confirm that it was in business, as well. Sure, some folks would work together in that scenario as they did in real life, but some didn't. In fact, some worked in direct opposition to my vision and it was a lesson I'll never forget. The fact that this was once hidden from me and was now so obvious was eye opening. I wanted to get to the next steps in the process ASAP, but my coach assured me that EOS has a proven order that needed to be followed.

Implementing the remainder of EOS from the book took me several months. The good news is that things got easier quickly after removing four of the five employees who didn't fit the core values. This happened using something EOS refers to as the people analyzer. Letting people go was painful, and in hindsight, I should have ripped the band aid off right away, and just cut them all at once and dealt with it at the time, but I didn't. Hindsight is a bugger, so don't give it the time of day. Just do your best and be encouraged that when meaningful change begins happening. It'll give you an extra energy boost that you'll need and appreciate.

[Please turn to page 27](#)

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## Just Browsing, Thanks

SO... this moose walks into a medical building...

While that could be a setup to a bad joke, it actually happened in Anchorage one Thursday.

A young moose trudging through the snow looking for a meal spotted green plants in the lobby of a medical building in the Providence Alaska Health Park and decided to drop in for a dose of greenery.

The ingenious — or lucky — moose triggered the sensors on the automatic doors to the building that houses the hospital's cancer center and other medical offices, said Randy Hughes, the hospital's director of security.

"We received a call from one of our tenants advising that a moose had just walked into the building," Hughes said.

Hughes believes it's the same moose that has been hanging around campus. And even though moose are commonplace in Alaska, they made an announcement over the intercom of the moose's presence out of safety concerns.

"But it seemed like it was a magnet for people to come and see it," he said. "It's not every day you get a moose walking into a building, so everybody was excited to take pictures and stuff like that."

On one video posted on social media, a woman wearing a mask and dressed in scrubs can be heard saying, "That's crazy," as she walked by the moose, snapping a photo with her phone.

The moose was too preoccupied eating the office plants to notice the stir he was causing.

Security officers formed a semicircle to corral the moose and shoo it out the door. One officer even grabbed a piece of the plant the moose had been eating and tried to lure it out.

"Finally, I think it had enough of everybody watching him, watching him eat," Hughes said.

The moose vacated the building but hung around in the building's semicircular drive for a bit before heading to the other side of the building to bed down for an afternoon.

This wasn't the first time a moose went inside one of the hospital complex's buildings, and bears have tried to get into the emergency room before.

Hughes said there's "never a dull moment here at the hospital."

## Florida Police Attempt to Wrangle Sand-Gator

Police in Florida responded to a beach to round up what appeared to be a large alligator but was soon discovered to be a realistic sand sculpture.

"Crikey! Look at the size of that gator one of our officers tried rounding up

on Treasure Island Beach last night," the Treasure Island Police Department wrote in posting a photo of the faux gator to Facebook.

The Facebook post shows an officer poking at the tail of the not-reptile, and

learning it was actually a well-designed sand sculpture.

"We love the talented people creating works of art in the sand, but with it being turtle nesting season, remember to flatten sandcastles/sculptures before you leave. The sea turtles will thank you," the Facebook post said.

## Tired of Murder Hornet? How 'Bout Parachute Spiders?

I am trying to keep an open mind about Joro spiders, those giant creepy crawlies that come floating down out of the blue at any moment and land on...Aaaaieeee! Look out! Somebody roll up a newspaper and start swatting!"

(Just kidding. About rolling up a newspaper, I mean. Honest-to-gosh newspapers are quite rare in households these days. I should have said something like, "Grab a phone book and start..." Oh, wait; no phone books either. But you catch my drift.)

By now you've surely heard of Joro spiders — or "parachute" spiders as they're sometimes called. The nickname comes from the fact they extend long, billowy silk threads. They spread by "ballooning" on breezes and get deposited wherever and whenever the wind dies down.

Joro spiders have been spreading a lot in the southern U.S. since 2013, when they were first discovered in Georgia. Ever since, they've been documented in South Carolina, North Carolina and Tennessee. Scientists say it's just a matter of time before they'll be found throughout the East.

Based on photos I've seen, Joro spiders are easy on the eye. They're bright yellow, with iridescent blotches of red and blue.

But it's not their color you'll notice. It's their size. These things are huge — about the size of the palm of a human hand.

Be still my fluttering heart.

But at least they don't seem to be a threat to people. Despite their enormity, they have tiny choppers that would have a difficult time piercing human skin.

They're natives of Japan. Researchers assume they hitched the same ride as murder hornets, emerald ash borers, spotted lantern flies and countless other invasive species: aboard cargo ships from afar.

I must confess a biological

**Sam Venable**  
*Department of Irony*



prejudice. Of all members in the animal kingdom, arachnids are my least favorite. This bias is likely due to the fact that ticks — or "\$%@#!" ticks, as I prefer to call them — are of the same ilk.

The only exceptions to my arachnid aversion are writing spiders. It wouldn't be August in East Tennessee if the morning countryside wasn't decorated with their intricate webs, glistening with dew. Of course, dew-dropped webs are visible and easily sidestepped. When I get a face full of invisible webbing on non-dew mornings, the "\$%@#!" prefix also applies to writing spiders.

Nonetheless, I'm holding final judgement on Joro spiders. They have one quality that might elevate them to favored-species status.

Their favorite American food is *stink bugs*.

Any spider, alien or otherwise, that helps reduce the stink bug population can't be all bad. And if they happen to develop a taste for "\$%@#!" ticks, I say we welcome them with eight open arms.

*Sam Venable is an author, comedic entertainer, and humor columnist for the Knoxville (TN) News Sentinel. His latest book is "The Joke's on YOU! (All I Did Was Clean Out My Files)." He may be reached at [sam.venable@outlook.com](mailto:sam.venable@outlook.com).*

## Groves Introduces Heavy-Duty Tool Storage System

Groves has announced a new product: the all-in-one Groves Tool Storage System. Now fabricators can store all their tools, accessories, and other small items in one safe and secure location.

Engineered with robust, welded steel construction and powder coated, this heavy-duty system combines durability and security with functionality and organization.

This space-saving locker system is available as a mobile system with either two or three individual lockers, or as a wall-mounted system, and arranged with any quantity of individual lockers. Each individual locker measures 20 inches deep x 24 inches wide x 72 inches tall and



The new Tool Storage System is available with two or three individual lockers

comes standard with three shelf levels and a rear security panel. You can customize your system using additional shelves, optional metal peg boards and metal louvered panels, as well as a security door and security shelf. Groves

promotes the new product as "the only tool storage solution you'll ever need."

For more information see their website [www.groves.com](http://www.groves.com) or call 800-991-2120.

## Stone Restoration and Maintenance Corner



Using my Makita grinder to do tough work on a shower stall vertical surface. The "D" handle helps me maintain good control.

and pick up a Dewalt, which still runs pretty good to this day. If you're going to use your tool for anything that may require the best motor strength, like a custom planetary driver, I would stick to the Flex or Makita, for sure.

These are many of the issues with hand tool use. Remember, running a hand tool is exhausting, especially doing edge work. Plan and price accordingly for all hand tool work. Don't be that contractor who gets beat up on costs at the end, because of the unaccounted for additional labor and product expended doing the hand tool work the right way.

As always and before beginning

any new project, I recommend submitting a test area to confirm the results and the procedure, prior to starting a stone or hard surface restoration/maintenance project. Also, the best way to help ensure success is by partnering with a good distributor, like BB Industries, that knows the business. They can help with technical support, product purchase decisions, logistics, and other pertinent project information.

*Bob Murrell has worked in the natural stone industry for over 40 years and is well known for his expertise in natural stone, tile, and decorative concrete restoration and maintenance. He helped develop some of the main products and processes which revolutionized the industry, and is currently the Director of Operations for M3 Technologies.*

Send your comments and questions to Bob at attn: [publisher@slipperyrockgazette.net](mailto:publisher@slipperyrockgazette.net).

*Continued from page 19*

I have sold many brands of hand tool machines through the years. I've always liked Flex, Makita, Fein, and Metabo, which are all industry standards. I like my Makita 9237 CX3 but have also had to run out to a box store

## Juice Jacking



*Continued from page 18*

- The device battery is draining much quicker than normal.
- There are apps on your device you don't remember downloading.

Juice jacking is considered a cyber-crime and a federal crime – which means the FBI handles cyber-crime in the United States. If you get juice jacked, you need to report it quickly. The sooner you report it, the quicker they can shut it down. Plus, the faster you act, the more apt you are to recover losses. All you have to do is go to [ic3.gov](https://ic3.gov) and click on the File a Complaint tab. Then just fill in the info and let them do the work.

Did you know that cyber-crime, not just juice jacking, but all cyber-crime, has more than tripled in the last five years? In 2018, the FBI received just under 352,000 complaints, with total losses at \$2.7 billion. Fast forward to 2022: there were just under 801,000 complaints filed, with losses totaling \$10.3 billion.

Juice jacking is a newer form of cyber-crime, with not a lot of exposure. Part of the problem is that it is not an instantly recognized crime. Sometimes it takes a while to realize there is a problem. However, the FCC, FBI and numerous other agencies are taking this new age problem seriously, and issuing warnings and tips to the public to try and raise awareness before it becomes a serious issue.

Think about it: how many people are in airports, lobbies and other public places, every day, charging? Millions. That's millions of opportunities for the bad guys to get their hands on an unimaginable amount of personal and even business data.

Scammers, hackers, and thieves are just sitting around waiting for the good people of the world to plug in and charge. Once you do that, they have access to accounts, passwords, and any other information you keep on your device. Be aware and don't let them get you.

Please send your thoughts and comments on this article to Sharon Koehler at [Sharonk.SRG@gmail.com](mailto:Sharonk.SRG@gmail.com).

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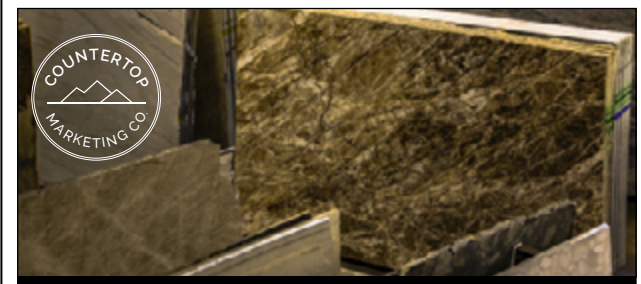
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2023

## CLASSIFIED AD DEADLINES

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TUESDAY, MAY 23, 2023

AUGUST 2023 ISSUE

TUESDAY, JUNE 27, 2023

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TUESDAY, JULY 25, 2023

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Granite, Marble, Quartz, Stone, Concrete.
- Remove Mesh.
- Quickly hone or polish the underside of overhangs.
- Flip the stone and finish the back side.
- Work with full slabs.
- Has a handle for full slabs and floor work.

## Great Minds

*Continued from page 21*

You may be thinking, *Interesting story, Eric, but how can any of this matter to me?* Well, there's an opportunity to learn directly from the author of Traction and creator of EOS, Gino Wickman. You can do this and more for your business and skip a bunch of the mistakes I made, too! Gino has agreed to do a half-day workshop at the SFA's StoneBiz On The Beach, with the sole focus being stone fabricators. This workshop won't be about hyperbole and theory, but rather Gino will be taking this time to work through the EOS process for stone shops. You will gain ideas from real working shops using EOS, as he will be using these real life examples from stone shops to help us work through the process so we have something we can bring back to our companies and make changes. This is a workshop in the truest sense of the word, and it is very special as Gino only does these two or three times a year. This workshop is designed to make a difference for those who show up and do the work. Gino's doing it to make a difference in the lives of business owners like you and me.

Here's the plan for this event: The SFA will host the workshop at a gorgeous resort in Puerto Rico. We will kick off the event with a reception Wednesday

**Leadership ability is the lid that determines a person's level of effectiveness.**  
—John Maxwell

evening, November 1, 2023. The focus Thursday and Friday mornings will be business training, with afternoons and evenings open for fun networking opportunities and activities. We will wrap up the event Saturday morning, but you are welcome to come early, or stay longer to extend the trip. There is a cost to register, but it includes your stay at the resort, several meals, and admission to the workshops each day. You can find event details and registration information at [www.stonebizonthesea.com](http://www.stonebizonthesea.com).

Ever hear the quote "When the student is ready, the master will appear?" Are you ready?

If you want to grow your business and operate more efficiently, please join us this November 1-4 at **StoneBiz On The Beach** in Puerto Rico.

*Eric Rolseth has been making countertops since 1985 and he's been a company owner for 32 of those years. He's also an inventor and current Board member of the Stone Fabricators Alliance. For more information, please visit [stonefabricatorsalliance.com](http://stonefabricatorsalliance.com).*

## The Stone Detective

### CSI or CSI?

I was eating breakfast at my favorite greasy spoon and flirting with Flo when my phone rang. I answered it with a casual, "Stone Detective, here." The person calling said she had several red stains on her marble floor, and she needed help trying to find out what they are and how to remove them.

I put down my coffee cup and wiped my mouth with my napkin. A dame with a mystery on her hands – it sounded like just the kind of case that could put a little jingle in my pocket. I told the voice on the other end of the line to give me the address and I'd be there in a jiffy.

I hopped in my ole Woody and made my way across town to the swanky side of the city. Her mansion was impressive, but it was the red stains on her marble floor that caught my eye. They were deep and dark, like they'd been there for some time. I asked her some questions about the stains, but she was as clueless as a kitten in a yarn shop.

I got down on my hands and knees and took a closer look. The stains didn't look like any kind of spill I'd seen before. They were too thick and too red. I had a hunch it wasn't just a case of spilled wine or ketchup.

I pulled out my trusty magnifying glass and started to investigate. I happen to have one of those blood detection vials that you see on many of the CSI shows. I swabbed the stain and placed it in the vial and waited for the results. The stains were definitely blood.

I told her what I'd found, and she looked pale as a ghost. She admitted that her husband had been acting strangely lately, and she thought he might be having an affair. I had a feeling the case was going to get even stickier.

I told her I wasn't that kind of detective, and I was only there to ID the stains and tell her what she

*Dr. Frederick M. Hueston, PhD*

needed to remove them. After all, I'm not a CSI (Crime Scene Investigator), but I am a CSI (Certified Stone Inspector— I can see why she might be confused). I'm also not a marriage counselor.

I told her that the best way to remove the stains was with a hydrogen peroxide poultice. I said I needed to run to my car and get her some instructions. As I made my way to the door, I heard a noise behind me. I turned around to see her husband standing there, I knew then that this was one case that was going to require more than just a little more finesse.

I raised an eyebrow at the husband's sudden appearance. He had the look of a man who had been caught red-handed, and it wasn't just the stains on his shirt that gave him away. I could tell he was nervous, and he didn't try to hide it.

"Who the heck are you?" he asked, his voice trembling.

I introduced myself as the Stone Detective and explained why I was there. The husband seemed relieved but still wary of my presence. He didn't say much else, just stood there fidgeting with his tie.

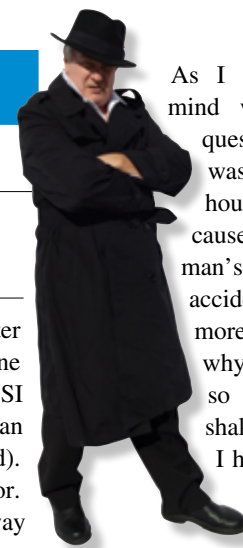
I made my way to the car and retrieved the instructions for the hydrogen peroxide poultice. When I returned, the wife was still in the same spot, staring at her husband with a mix of anger and sadness.

As I handed her the instructions, I couldn't help but feel sorry for her. She was caught in the middle of something, and it wasn't just the stains on her husband's shirt.

"I hope this helps," I said, trying to get out of there as fast as I could.

She thanked me and I made a hasty retreat for the door.

This was the first time I feared for my life doing a simple inspection. I thought about calling the cops, but I just got in my Woody and headed out of town.



As I drove away, my mind was racing with questions about what was going on in that household. What had caused the stains on the man's shirt? Was it an accident or something more sinister? And why did the wife seem so upset? I couldn't shake the feeling that I had stumbled upon something much bigger than a simple stain

removal job. But as much as I wanted to know more, I knew it was better for my own safety to stay out of it. Days turned into weeks and I found myself still thinking about that strange encounter. I even considered going back to the house to see if everything was okay, but I didn't want to risk getting involved in something dangerous. Eventually, I let it go and focused on my work. But every once in a while, I would catch myself wondering what had really happened in that house and if the wife was okay.

*The Stone Detective is a fictional character created by Dr. Frederick M. Hueston, PhD, written to entertain and educate. Dr. Fred has written over 33 books on stone and tile installations, fabrication and restoration and also serves as an expert for many legal cases across the world. Send your comments to [fhueston@stoneforensics.com](mailto:fhueston@stoneforensics.com).*

**"Outstanding leaders go out of their way to boost the self-esteem of their personnel. If people believe in themselves, it's amazing what they can accomplish."**  
— Sam Walton

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