

The Rockheads Group—Moving Fabrication Forward

IN 2014, shop owners Jon Kaplan, Nick Began, Paul Menninger, Eric Tryon and Larry Crowley, shared after-hour drinks during a Cosentino Global S.L.U. Conference. They touched on a variety of business-related subjects, eventually admitting that even though they were successful, if they had known each other in the beginning, things would have been much easier. When the conference was over, the five men went back to their companies slightly changed from talking shop. The wheels in their heads were turning, and brilliant ideas were forming, and just weeks later, while tossing the ideas back and forth, an Aha moment was realized by the five, and Rockheads was formed.

So, what was this initial Rockheads group all about, you're wondering? Well, I wondered too, and after a wee bit of research, I called Executive Director Rich Katzmann, and asked "What's up with Rockheads?"

Katzmann came to Rockheads with many years of construction and home improvement experience as well as a five-year stint as president of Laser Products Industries.

by Peter J. Marcucci

Photos Courtesy Rockheads Group

by like-minded owners without fear of giving away secrets to a close competitor. Our feeling was simple: why wouldn't a shop owner in Florida, mindshare information with someone in Pennsylvania? This concept made everyone much more open to sharing their 'secret sauce.'

A Purchasing Powerhouse

During its first 5 years, as Rockheads membership grew, vendors and equipment manufacturers were chomping at the bit to get on board. Companies like BACA, Laser Products Industries, BB Industries, and Park Industries to name a few, saw great opportunity in selling to a select audience, while the Rockheads saw an even greater opportunity for its members to save big bucks. Currently, Rockheads has 110 members with combined yearly revenues totaling a whopping 1.5 billion, said Katzmann, adding, "The organization is set up, so that I can go to a large or small vendor in the industry, and even



Above: Rockheads members immersed in the wonders of innovation: Exploring the T-Rex machine by Poseidon Industries during an enriching visit to Star Lumber during the Oklahoma City Summer event.

Below, Left: Oklahoma City conference participants delight in the fruitful outcomes of benchmarking efforts, fostering knowledge exchange and growth.



He recalled, "The original and current owners of Rockheads started the group as a way for shop owners to network. For the first five years it was small and exclusive, and nearly 100% focused on information sharing. The 30 or so member group was broken up into exclusive territories, so that information could be freely shared

outside the industry, and say, 'Look, here's how we can give you access to one and a half billion dollars' worth of buying power. I can give you this, but in exchange, you need to offer our members an exclusive purchasing program.'"

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BB Industries Honored as a 2023 Top Workplace

BB Industries, one of the stone industry's leading fabrication suppliers and distributors received a Top Workplaces 2023 award from *Knox News (Knoxville News Sentinel)*, matching its performance in 2021 and 2022. The award is based solely on employee feedback gathered through a third-party survey administered by employee engagement technology partner Energage LLC.

"This award helps us gel even more as an organization and everyone who works here should be proud that they contribute to such a special atmosphere," said Rick Stimac, BB Industries CEO/president. "We know that translates to our valued customers and vendor partners and makes us one

of the best in the industry."

The anonymous survey by Energage measures 15 culture drivers that are critical to the success of any organization: including alignment, execution, and connection.

"Companies need to authentically represent their brand to job-seekers," said Eric Rubino, Energage CEO. "The employee experience needs to be on the mission-critical list. Leaders who embrace a people-first culture will benefit greatly.

"By giving employees a voice and showcasing your authentic culture through employer branding, organizations can attract those job seekers who complement their culture. Culture drives performance."

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Rockheads Group

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Advanced Best Practices, Networking, and Benchmarking Programs

All Rockheads companies are at different stages of their life, and it's Katzmann's job to pair them with shops that can use each other's acquired wisdoms. "I'll get a call from a member shop that is doing \$10 million per year in revenue, but can't figure out how to make the leap to \$20 million. We've got 30 Rockheads members who have already made that leap, so I'll put that smaller company in touch with a larger one that I think is appropriate, and they can talk to each other, discuss the successes and mistakes they've made in the past, and help get them over that hump. We have so many members, at so many different levels, that networking help for any member is available."



Selecting the Best Partners: Over a dozen vendors bring invaluable networking and group buying prospects to Rockheads Group members at the Oklahoma City gathering.



Benchmarking

Another of the important programs available to members is benchmarking. Because Rockheads has so many member shops, Katzmann is able to do a financial comparison between companies, he explained. "On an annual basis, we do an extensive benchmarking analysis. Our shops will send us their financials, and we aggregate everything! For example, we've got 60 shops that I can look at, and tell what they got paid per square foot for an install, or what their gross margin is for custom builders in their area. We can do these extensive analyses that can allow a shop to compare themselves to not only a shop similar to them, but now they can see that if they want to go to \$10 and then \$20 million in sales, what those numbers will look like or maybe see why they can't grow, because their numbers are off. Finally, because we are getting so many data points from our members, it allows me to slice and dice that information in different ways, and still make

it statistically valid. Benchmarking also allows us to compare urban shops, suburban shops and big city, high density shops, regionally, while also doing cost per square foot and labor costs. We love it, it's unique, lots of fun, and a high value part of what comes with being part of the group."

Becoming a Member

To become a Rockheads member, the group does have criteria that a perspective member must meet.

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Rockheads Group

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First, they have to be a fully automated wet shop with CNC and digital templating. This sort of ends the conversation right away if we are talking to a shop that hasn't gotten there yet, said Katzmann. Next, they have to have a yearly revenue over \$3 million. "By this point, if they've made it this far in our screening process, and this is very important, they have to be willing to share their best practices and benchmarking information," said Katzmann.

Finally, if a perspective member is within 90 miles of a current member, Rockheads will contact that member to make sure they are okay with that new shop coming in. Most of the time it's fine, but now and then they'll bring up an objection like: "Hey, that shop has poached employees or they have bad business practices, or they're

involved in a lawsuit!" Whatever the feedback is, Katzmann said, he will consult a few local shop owners to give him a feel for that new prospect coming in.

Once a perspective member has met the few qualifications, Katzmann aggressively gets the ball rolling, he continued.

"Our 'on-boarding' process goes like this: Our operations team gets the new member set up with a portal with best practices information, past events that we've recorded, and a future events calendar. Then, we have a vendor on-boarding, where our vendor specialist talks to that shop, finds out what their needs are, and then recommends one or more of our 41 vendor programs to get them going and save them money. Then, to integrate that shop, we introduce them through emails and social media, explaining fun stuff like their hobbies, what's unique about them or



Learning from the Best: Rockhead members are captivated by Chris Gunn of Star Lumber as he imparts his invaluable expertise and best practices.



their shop, and push that out to the rest of the membership. Furthermore, we'll assign an experienced member in the group to become a one-on-one mentor to the new member. It's called our Concierge feature, and really helps a new member feel comfortable and not intimidated when coming into our group. New members are also urged to attend our weekly webinars, to further introduce themselves. Finally, we have about 4 live events every year. They are free for our members, and we want them there meeting everybody. It's a great way for everyone to integrate and network with each other live, face-to-face."

In the Pipeline

When asked about the next five years, Katzmann said the goal is to hit the \$2 billion yearly revenue mark. "When we hit \$1 billion in our member's yearly revenues, it was amazing. Companies like American Express and Wells Fargo all of a sudden wanted to talk to us, and we feel a similar thing will happen when we get to \$2 billion. Getting to this mark will take about 30 new members, so we are going to push to get to that number. We currently have amazing vendors, and do not add many to the list each year, but when a new, innovative item comes up or a new solution to a problem, we definitely want to look at that vendor, qualify them, and give them exposure to our membership."

In closing, if you want to fast-track the growth of your company, no matter what stage it's in, consider what you stand to learn from some of the best minds, from some of the best shops in the country, and take a look at joining the Rockheads.

For more information visit www.rockheadsusa.com or call Rich Katzmann at 815-210-1006.

Top: Inspiration in Action: Attendees engaged in the presentation given by Patrick Goebel, CEO of Star Lumber, as he unveils the journey behind his empire's remarkable rise.

Bottom: Behind the Scenes with Chris Gunn: Revealing the intricate process of capturing granite slab images and seamlessly integrating them into the ERP system.



**"It is impossible to be objective, so we must try to be fair."
– David Brinkley**

Special Feature in this Issue...



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The Voice of the Stone Fabricator

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INTRODUCING

Natural Stone Catalogue

This catalogue is a collection of images and material details to help buyers identify appropriate natural stone materials for their projects.

*Developed by the North American Quarry Advocacy Group.
Powered by the Natural Stone Institute.*

Find out more:
stones.naturalstoneinstitute.org

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Industry Calendar of Events

October 2023

Park Industries: Parkfest

When: Tuesday, October 3 to Wednesday, October 4, 2023

Where: St. Cloud, MN at Park Industries headquarters

ISFA: 2023 Annual Conference

When: Monday, October 16 to Thursday, October 19, 2023

Where: Sint Maartin; **Registration ends August 30, 2023**

Visit www.isfanow.org/calendar for more information and to register.

Rockheads Group, 365 Call: Benchmarking Results

When: Thursday, October 19, 2023

Where: Online

NSI: Connecticut Stone Summit, One Day Workshop

When: Thursday, October 19, 2023 – 9am to 3pm

Where: Sint Maartin; **Registration ends August 30, 2023**

Visit Naturalstoneinstitute.org for more info.

NTCA, CTDA, TCNA, TCAA: Total Solutions Plus

When: October 22 to October 24, 2023

Where: Hilton Riverside Hotel, New Orleans, LA

Visit www.ctdahome.org/tsp/2023/ for more information and to register

BACA Systems Training

When: October 25 & 26, 2023

Where: Orion Township, Michigan

November 2023

Rockheads Group, 365 Call: Business Processes Part II

When: Thursday, November 2, 2023

Where: Online

ISFA: New Member Workshop

When: Wednesday, November 8, 2pm to 3pm

Where: Online

Visit www.isfanow.org/calendar for more information and to register.

NSI: Texas Stone Summit, One Day Workshop

When: Thursday, November 9, 9am to 3pm CDT

Where: Triton Stone Group, Austin, Texas

ISFA: Stone Industry Training Days

When: Tuesday, November 13 to Wednesday, November 14

Where: Zoller North America Headquarters, Ann Arbor, Michigan

NSI: Effects of Deicing Chemicals in Natural Stone **When:** Thursday, November 30, 11am to 12pm ET

Where: Online

Visit Naturalstoneinstitute.org for more info.

December 2023

ISFA: Stone Industry Training– Sales Rep Clinic, Part 8

When: Wednesday, December 6, 2023

Where: Online

Visit www.isfanow.org/calendar for more information and to register.

NSI: Virtual Quarry Tour

When: Thursday, December 14, 12:00pm ET

Where: Online

ISFA: General Member Meeting

When: Thursday, December 14, 2pm to 3pm

Where: Online

Visit www.isfanow.org/calendar for more information and to register.

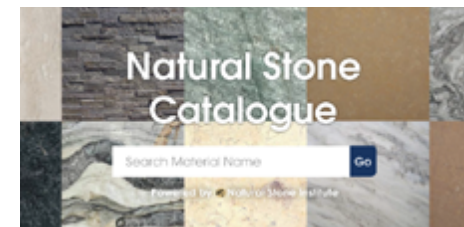
NSI Announces New Natural Stone Catalog

The Natural Stone Institute is proud to announce the debut of the Natural Stone Catalog, a new digital tool that will showcase NSI members' natural stone offerings and material specifications. This tool will meet the needs of the design community by becoming a resource for finding natural stone options for projects.

The Natural Stone Catalog has been a key initiative for the North American Quarry Advocacy Group (NAQAG) and serves as a replacement for two existing online stone catalogs: NSI's Stones of North America website and National Building Granite Quarry Association's Granite Colors page.

Catalog users can browse by color, stone type, product category, quarry location, and sustainability goals. They can also access photos, testing information, material details, and contact information to identify a distributor.

NAQAG chair Reid Kubesh (Coldspring) commented: "In addition to being a great resource for the A&D and hardscape communities, this resource will also become a significant member benefit for



quarriers. Participation is free and the exposure provided far exceeds the annual cost of membership."

There are currently over 140 stones featured in the catalog, with more being added regularly. The goal is for all NSI quarry members to be featured soon.

NSI board member Jeff Erickson (Cutting Edge Countertops) shared this after seeing the Catalog: "Not only is the site a great benefit for our quarry members and the design community, it will also be a major resource for fabricators, installers, and restoration professionals as they work with customers to choose materials."

Find the Natural Stone Catalog at stones.naturalstoneinstitute.org.

BB Industries a 2023 Top Workplace

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"Over the past year we have added additional locations and personnel to give our customers the highest level of service, and the fastest delivery times in the industry, nationwide," said Stimac. We have earned our reputation as a great place to work in the industry, and that helps BBI to continue to experience company and employee growth."

BBI Customer Rep Ken Brock also commented, "I've been here 21 years, and this is honestly the best job I've ever had. The people here genuinely care about our customers, and form long-term relationships with them based on trust. And the guys I work with—We care about each other, here."

Many companies often state that they are building relationships with their customers," said Karen Hamilton, BB Industries human resources manager. "I believe the difference for BBI is that we build relationships with our employees first. We know that without our employees, their dedication, their time,



and commitment we certainly would not be where we are today.

"Our employees are the difference in making BB Industries successful. We know that, appreciate that, and do our best to show it. We genuinely care about one another. We do not just say it, we mean it."

Since its beginning in 1994, BBI's philosophy has been to offer the best customer service, the best value, and the highest-quality tools available for the stone industry. This is accomplished by delivering exceptional products and first-class service to our partners in the stone, tile, and restoration industries. For more info, visit BBIndustriesLLC.com and <https://www.facebook.com/BBIndustriesLLC.USA>.

TRAINING & EDUCATION

The Power of Sales Follow-Up

WE often think of good salespeople as those people who have charisma, great product knowledge, and the ability to hold a conversation with a fence post. These are all great traits, but they mean little without consistent structured follow-up.

If you don't follow-up quickly on an inquiry from your Facebook ad, your sparkling charisma won't improve your odds of making contact with that prospect.

If you don't follow-up on the quotes you send out, your vast product knowledge won't improve your conversion rate.

While following up on leads and quotes is critical, consistency and structure for those follow-ups are the essential keys to successfully increasing sales.

The Importance of Following-Up

Here are statistics from various sources on sales follow-up: Only 2% of sales are made during the first contact. 80% of sales require at least 5 follow-ups. Fully 45% of salespeople give up after just 1 follow-up attempt. Only 8% of salespeople follow-up more than 5 times.

Based on those stats, simply increasing the number of follow-up attempts could greatly increase your overall sales. This begs the question: If your sales are dropping, do you need more sales leads or do you just need to follow-up more frequently?

The Impact of Time

Here are some additional stats that show the impact of time on follow-ups: If contact is made in first 5 minutes of receiving a lead, you are 10 to 20 times more likely to make contact. After 5 minutes, the odds of connecting drop 80%. 30%-50% of sales go to the vendor that responds first. Mobile devices drive 45% of all leads.

The takeaway here is timing is everything. If you are struggling to make contact when you get a lead, the solution may be improving the speed of your response. The quicker you respond to a lead, the higher your probability of making contact.

The Financial Impact

Let's quantify the sales impact from following this advice. For our analysis let's assume you are currently making contact with 10% of leads you receive, and

Ed Young
Fabricator's Business Coach

you are quoting half of those. So, for every 100 leads, you make contact with 10 prospects, and you generate 5 quotes. If your conversion rate is 40% (converting quotes to orders), then those 100 leads generate 2 orders. If your average order is \$10,000 then that's \$20,000 in new revenue.

Let's assume you are currently taking 30 minutes, an hour, or longer to follow-up on new leads. If you convert to a system where you follow-up within 5 minutes of receiving the lead, then those 100 leads could become 40 contacts which generate 20 quotes, leading to 8 orders. That's \$80,000 in revenue from those 100 leads. Just changing to a quick less-than-5-minute follow-up can increase revenue.

If you are currently only making one follow-up attempt after a quote, then increasing follow-ups to 5 to 12 times could easily double your conversion rate. Combine that impact with the short less-than-5-minute follow-up and the original \$20,000 in sales becomes \$160,000. It's clear that, to increase sales, you don't necessarily need more leads. You just need to make better use of the ones you already have.

Structuring the Follow-Ups

Structuring your follow-up sequence and timing ensures your follow-up process is consistent. If you decide to change any aspect of the follow-up program, having a consistent process gives you good baseline data from which to evaluate those changes.

A typical recommendation for follow-up cadence is 6 to 8 touches over 3 weeks with a maximum of 3 days between touches. These recommendations include rotating emails, phone calls, and texts as communication methods. A sample follow-up sequence would look something like this:

Day 1 – phone call + voice mail

Day 2 – email

Day 4 – text

Day 7 – email

Day 10 – text

Day 13 – phone call + voice mail

Day 15 – email

Day 18 – text

**It is clear that, to increase sales,
you don't necessarily need more leads.
You just need to make better use
of the ones you already have.**

Day 21 – email

Day 24 – text

Day 25 – break up phone call + voice mail

Part of structuring the follow-ups is to also structure the content of each follow-up message. What is the content of each voice mail? What is the content of each email and text? What is the content of the 'break up' voice mail?

Crafting the content for each of the messages is important since the wording and tone of that content leaves a lasting impression with the prospect. It is worth noting that each message doesn't need to be a 'push' to close the sale. For the emails and texts, you can always offer some helpful bit of information that will be useful to the prospect. You can include tips on how to prepare for their template and for their install (separate messages). You can offer information on the differences between the various materials you offer so the prospect can make a better-informed decision. Certainly, all messages should be tailored to reflect whether you are following up on a lead or following up on a quote.

That's a Lot of Work!

If you had to manually send all those emails and texts, this certainly would be a lot of work. The good news is you can automate all these follow-ups with a CRM (Customer Relationship Manager) software package.

Current CRM technology can not only automate sending emails and texts, but it can also remind your salespeople to make calls. Additionally, a CRM will allow you to track lead performance, conversion rates, and contact success rates while also tracking the performance of your salespeople.

Another benefit of a CRM is, as you collect email addresses from leads, quotes, and customers, you can begin to build email

campaigns that run automatically over long periods of time. A consistent email campaign can offer lots of useful information to help prospects understand the countertop process better and understand trends in colors and materials. You can also share generally useful information about remodeling, kitchen and bath design, new housing construction – pretty much anything that could be useful to a potential countertop purchaser. These long-term campaigns can help build your brand with prospects. It can also give recent customers helpful information that keeps your company front-of-mind. When someone asks that person who they recommend for countertops, your company will be the first one they think of.

As the economy shows signs of slowing, the cost of leads from social media is increasing. This makes it more critical than ever to fully utilize the leads you get.

Lack of follow-up on sales leads and on quotes is one of the biggest missed opportunities in the countertop business. Companies that have a robust system for follow-up find their prospect acquisition costs stay lower and their sales are more consistent. If you need more sales revenue, look long and hard at your follow-up process for leads and quotes. It may just be the key that gets you through an economic slump.

If you are struggling to reach your business goals or if you're just stressed out and are ready to regain some sanity in your business, hit my website and schedule an assessment or contact me at Ed@FabricatorsCoach.com. We'll talk about your situation, and I'll help you develop a plan to reduce the chaos, make more money, and get your life back.



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TRAINING & EDUCATION

Seven Strategies We've Used to Amplify a Sale Team's Performance

If you're an owner or operator of a stone fabrication or countertop company without a sales manager on staff, you likely have limited bandwidth to drive the level of performance you need from your salespeople to ensure your business is successful and profitable. Sales reps are the keystone to a business's success and profitability because they directly influence revenue generation and the quality of your customer relationships.

The challenge for many stone shops is (even with a sales manager) with endless responsibilities, often there is limited oversight and support of your sales team. Getting them to perform at the level you need might seem like another mountain to climb. But there's good news – it's a climb that can be made easier, and we have just the roadmap for you.

Some of the Common Problems

1. Lack of Oversight: Without a dedicated sales manager, there's no one to monitor and assess sales performances. This can lead to missed opportunities and inconsistencies in the sales approach.

2. Limited Onboarding of Sales Reps: Without proper initiation, new hires might feel lost and struggle to understand company products, values, processes, and/or selling techniques.

3. No Development of Skills: Despite the critical role of sales in businesses, a surprising 70% of sales reps lack formal training (source: Task Drive), leaving them ill-equipped to succeed in their role and meet your expectations.

4. Lacking the Right Tools and Processes: To excel, sales reps need more than just a phone and a contact list. They need, at minimum, a proper CRM (Customer Relationship Management) tool to organize, strategize, and optimize their sales process and activities.

Lack of these critical elements doesn't just limit sales performance and revenue generation; it impacts employee

Justin Shaw
Stone Fabricator Elite



satisfaction. Sales reps, when unsupported, tend to underperform, leading to high turnover rates. Now that we've discussed the problems, let's look at the solutions.

7 Strategies to Amplify Sales Rep Performance

1. Proper Onboarding Process: Before they make their first call or attend their first meeting, sales reps should be thoroughly acquainted with your products, company culture, and the industry at large. An effective onboarding process can set the tone for their entire journey with your company.

2. Defined Sales Process: Each sale shouldn't be a new adventure. Having a defined process means each lead is approached systematically, increasing the chances of conversion. This process should be adaptable to individual client needs, but its essence should remain constant.

3. Structuring Sales Rep Days (Time Blocking): Structure is the backbone of efficiency. By time blocking, reps can dedicate specific hours to client calls, prospect research, lead nurturing, and admin tasks, ensuring each activity gets its due attention.

4. Use of a Proper CRM Tool: Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tools are no longer optional. They help track

Don't leave your sales rep's performance to chance!

I hope you found this article helpful and that you can adopt some or all of the strategies shared here. If you're thinking, "This all makes sense, but how do I fit it into my already packed calendar?" Let's dive into that with our 7th way to amplify sales rep performance!

7. Leverage a team of Sales Sidekicks!

Many of the country's top stone fabrication and countertop companies are already benefiting from using the industry-leading Sales Sidekick Program. Shops that are benefiting from having a team of Sales Sidekicks to support their sales reps and performance include members of the Rockheads Group, ISFA, and Stone Fabricator Alliance. The Sales Sidekick Program is a turnkey solution tailored to address the gaps we've covered here and to level up sales rep performance—without adding more work to your plate.

This unique program provides:

CRM Sales Pipeline Oversight: Ensuring that no lead slips through the cracks.

Rep Accountability: We track sales rep performance and offer consistent feedback.

Weekly Sales Sprints: Fast-paced, focused efforts to achieve short-term goals.

Monthly Sales Training & Development: Regular skill upgrades to keep your team at the top of their game.

Don't leave your sales performance to chance! While your dedication and hard work have brought you this far, investing in your sales team will provide you with an outsized return and unlock the next level of growth for your business.

Justin Shaw is the founder of Stone Fabricator Elite, a new business development and sales improvement agency. Their flagship program includes providing end-to-end CRM implementation, full onboarding, support and monitoring to ensure sales teams are effectively using the tool and that the shops see a measurable improvement in sales. You can learn more about Stone Fabricator Elite at www.stonefabricatorelite.com.

interactions with prospects and clients, ensuring no lead is neglected. These tools provide insights into client preferences and behavior, assisting reps in tailoring their approach.

5. Reporting for Accountability: What gets measured gets managed. Regular reporting and feedback to reps ensure that salespeople are held accountable for their performance. It highlights areas of improvement and success stories to replicate.

6. Access to Sales Training Resources: Sales reps need to be provided with training resources and, ideally, also hands-on coaching. Here's a stat to consider: for the majority of sales professionals, 84% of their sales training is forgotten within three months. So it's important to make sales rep development an ongoing process versus a one-and-done approach.

An additional note on accountability and training. For nearly 60% of US-based companies, the primary challenge in delivering efficient sales training is ensuring accountability. If sales reps aren't held responsible for utilizing the knowledge they've acquired, the training can quickly become futile.

TRAINING & EDUCATION

NTCA Joins with More Than 500 Organizations to Help Build Tomorrow's Workforce

The National Tile Contractors Association joined with more than 500 trade associations, professional societies, businesses, and employers to form the Tomorrow's Workforce Coalition, established to build support for the Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act (S. 722 / H.R. 1477). The American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) and the Professional Certification Coalition (PCC) lead the new group.

The bipartisan, bicameral Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act would expand qualified expenses under 529 savings plans to include postsecondary training and credentialing, such as licenses and professional certifications. The bill would provide valuable tax-advantaged resources for families, students and workers—with or without a college degree—who pursue career growth, mid-career changes or pathways that diverge from a typical academic route.

"The Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act can empower workers of any educational background, skill level or age," said ASAE President and CEO Michelle Mason, FASAE, CAE. "This pragmatic policy would support all industries and professions that rely on employees with specialized training or credentials. Our community is grateful to the Congressional champions for their commitment to supporting our current and future workforce."

"Knowledge, skills and abilities are essential to help professionals grow their careers and for industries to grow their impact," said Institute for Credentialing Excellence Executive Director and co-leader of the PCC Denise



Roosendaal, FASAE, CAE. "It is a privilege to support the Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act, which will help strengthen industries, professions and the broader economy."

The bill is led by Representatives Rob Wittman (R-Va.) and Abigail Spanberger (D-Va.) in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) and Mike Braun (R-Ind.) in the U.S. Senate.

Training and credentialing organizations help expand industry excellence, establish and strengthen professional pathways, increase workers' earning power, foster marketplace competition and supply consumers with the best products, services and expertise. A member roster can be found at powerofassociations.org.

Established in 1947, the NTCA is a 501c6 trade association dedicated to the professional installation of ceramic tile, natural stone, and allied products. NTCA supports its members with technical and business training, savings and discounts, education and curriculum support, and apprenticeship. NTCA currently has more than 1,700 members and is widely recognized as the largest tile contractors association in the world.

"The most sacred of the duties of a government [is] to do equal and impartial justice to all citizens."

—Thomas Jefferson

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TRAINING & EDUCATION

Taking Care of the Future

In September's article I talked about the generic objective of every business: To make more money now and in the future. In that article I delved into the 'make more money' part of the objective, exploring how the three key results to ensure you are making more money are Throughput Dollars, Inventory Expense, and Operating Expense. This month I would like to explore the second part of that generic business's objective: "and in the future."

It is not sufficient to strategize on how your business will make more money in the near term. You must also consider how the actions you take today will impact your

Rick Phelps
Synchronous Solutions

future ability to earn more money. This leads logically to a secondary set of generic objectives for every business:

How you take care of your customers,
How you take care of your team,
How you take care of the environment.

How you take care of your customers

There is no future if you don't treat your customers well. That is obvious! And yet the research shows that the largest reason customers quit doing business with someone

People Leave Because...



- 1% - Death
- 3% - Move away
- 5% - Buy from a friend
- 9% - Sold by a competitor
- 14% - Product/Price
- **68% - Perceived Indifference**

actionCOACH
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is "perceived indifference," coming in at 68%. Too many businesses rely on inertia to keep their clients – the "cost" of changing from you to another supplier... What a terrible plan!

There is not much you can do about clients dying, moving away, or selling to a friend who got into the business, but there is a TON of stuff you can do to make sure your customers know you value them! Build those things into your annual strategic plan.

How you take care of your team

Years ago, I did some Lean Implementation consulting work for a nylon manufacturing plant. When you walked into the main hallway of the facility there were faded murals on the walls, one of which read "Employees are our most valuable assets!" What a great sentiment. The first two Kaizen events I facilitated with teams of hourly workers put \$3,000,000 and \$5,000,000 dollars per year to the bottom line. (I know this only because years later their Lean Coordinator asked me for a reference, sharing this information with me). On the Monday morning of the kick-off for the third Kaizen event, there was a palpable tension in the air as I walked past that mural. Something was wrong, and I soon found out what it was – the company had laid off 300 of their employees (including team #1) and rehired them as temps for less money and no benefits.

I did not lead that third Kaizen event.

If you can't afford to pay your team top wages for your area, you probably shouldn't be in business. Build into your strategic plan everything it will take to be the 'employer of choice' in your community. It's just good business!

How you take care of the environment

Be a good neighbor and great steward of the environment in which you operate. As a popular bumper sticker states: 'There is no Planet B'.

Maintaining your 'permission to operate' is critical to your future, so build this into your annual plan as well!

2023 is rapidly coming to a close. As you start thinking about 2024, build your strategic plan around being:

- **A great partner to do business with**
- **A great place to work**
- **A pillar of stewardship in the community**

And you won't be able to help but "make more money now and in the future."

If you need help with your strategic planning, reach out to us at Synchronous Solutions! Contact us through our website www.synchronousolutions.com/contact-us/.

**"Was deciding if I should dress as Batman or Spiderman for Halloween, when I realized I'm a grown man. So... Batman."
— Stephen Colbert**

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TRAINING & EDUCATION

Top Ten Marketing Tips for Countertop Shops

In a market saturated with options, it's essential for countertop shops to employ effective marketing strategies to stand out and capture the attention of potential customers. In this article, we'll delve deeper into the top 10 marketing tips that can help countertop shops not only survive but thrive in their local market.

1. Build a Professional Website

In the digital age, a well-constructed website serves as the cornerstone of your online presence. Your website should be a reflection of your brand identity, showcasing the quality and variety of countertop materials you offer. Utilize a clean and user-friendly design, making it easy for visitors to navigate through your product offerings, services, and portfolio of completed projects. High-resolution images of your countertops in real-life settings will give potential customers a tangible sense of what they can expect.

Stephen Alberts
Countertop Marketing

guides can not only boost your website's visibility but also position your shop as an authority in the industry. Here are some sample blog post ideas:

- *A Comprehensive Guide to Choosing the Perfect Countertop Material*
- *Maintaining the Beauty: Tips for Caring for Your Granite Countertops*
- *2023 Countertop Design Trends: What's In and What's Out*
- *Comparing Quartz and Marble: Which Countertop Material Is Right for You?*
- *Transform Your Kitchen: A Guide to Selecting Countertops for Different Design Styles*



2. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

A beautifully designed website is only effective if it's discoverable. This is where search engine optimization (SEO) comes into play. Research relevant keywords related to countertop materials, designs, and services. Incorporate these keywords naturally into your website's content, meta descriptions, and image alt tags. Consistently creating valuable and informative blog posts about countertop maintenance, design trends, and comparison

- *The Benefits of Custom Countertops: Why Personalization Matters*
- *Exploring Sustainable Countertop Options: Eco-Friendly Choices for Your Home*
- *Understanding the Pros and Cons of Butcher Block Countertops*
- *Countertop Edging Styles: Enhancing the Aesthetics of Your Kitchen*

3. Social Media Engagement

Social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest are powerful tools for visual storytelling. Regularly share captivating images and videos of your countertop installations, highlighting various styles and finishes. Engage with your audience by responding to comments, asking questions, and encouraging user-generated content. Contests, giveaways, and interactive polls can foster a sense of community and excitement around your brand.

4. Customer Reviews and Testimonials

The influence of online reviews and testimonials cannot be overstated. Positive feedback from satisfied customers can instill trust and confidence in potential buyers. Encourage your happy clients to leave reviews on platforms such as Google Business Profile, Facebook, and Houzz. Showcase these testimonials prominently on your website to reassure visitors of your shop's credibility and the quality of your work.

5. Local Business Listings

When individuals are searching for countertop solutions, they often turn to local business directories and search engines. Make sure your countertop shop is listed accurately on platforms like Google Business Profile, Bing Places, and Yelp. Complete your profiles with up-to-date information, high-quality images, and details about the types of countertops you offer. This increases the chances of your shop appearing in local search results.

6. Email Marketing Campaigns

While social media is important, don't underestimate the power of email marketing. Maintain a mailing list of interested customers who have opted in to receive updates from your shop. Send out regular newsletters that include information about new countertop materials, promotions, and upcoming events. Personalize your emails based on customer preferences to ensure your messages resonate with your audience.

7. Collaborate with Interior Designers

Interior designers often serve as trusted advisors for homeowners looking to renovate or remodel their spaces. By building strong relationships with local interior designers, you can tap into their network and gain valuable referrals. Offer them insights into the latest countertop trends and materials, and showcase how your products can complement their design visions.

8. Visual Content

Visual content is the backbone of showcasing your craftsmanship and the beauty of your countertop materials. Invest in professional photography and videography to capture your countertops in various lighting conditions and settings. Visual content can be shared on your website, social media, and even in email campaigns to give your audience a comprehensive understanding of the aesthetics and functionality of your products.

9. Attend Home and Trade Shows

Participating in home and trade shows provides a unique opportunity to engage with potential customers in a more personal way. Set up an appealing booth that demonstrates the breadth of your countertop options. Consider creating interactive displays that allow attendees to touch and feel different materials. Engage visitors with knowledgeable staff who can answer questions and provide insights about countertop selection and installation.

10. Educational Workshops and Seminars

Hosting educational workshops and seminars positions your countertop shop as a valuable resource within your community. These events could cover topics such as countertop maintenance, kitchen design, and home remodeling. By sharing your expertise, you not only establish your credibility but also forge deeper connections with potential customers.

[Please turn to page 15](#)

“For Halloween, I’m going as that feeling you get at a store when you try to refold a sweater properly and put it back on the shelf.”

– Rob Delaney

Reviews Are Here To Stay, So Get Onboard

Back in the day, people didn't have a lot to go on when they hired someone to perform services for them. There was the BBB (Better Business Bureau) and word of mouth. Sure, there was advertising, but you had to decide if you could believe it or not. After all, anybody can say anything they want to about anything they do. And to be honest, word-of-mouth can be sketchy as well. You asked your neighbor to recommend someone for a project, and they recommend their wife's-cousin's boyfriend's-father's company that they never used, and could be sketchy as hell. They don't know. They are just trying to keep it in the family. Sometimes, you simply went with your gut and hoped it worked out.

Fast forward to now and it's a whole different ball game. Not only is there the BBB

Sharon Koehler
Stone Industry Consultant

and the good old word of mouth, now there is social media, Google My Business, and business websites with testimonials and reviews right on them. Plus, there are dozens if not hundreds of sites where reviews can be posted such as Yelp, Trip Advisor, Angi, Manta and more. It never ends.

Reviews are the way of the world now. A survey taken by BrightLocal says that 87% of consumers read online reviews for local businesses when they are searching for something. Following that, 93% of consumers say that reviews influence their decisions when making purchases. It isn't just service companies anymore, either. Everyone wants or needs reviews: Doctors, dentists, lawyers, architects, restaurants,

Get with a review program to help your business compete and succeed.

ride share, house cleaners and so on and so on. Everyone is on this bandwagon, and your business can't afford to be left out.

Over time, the same excuses for not doing anything about company reviews keep coming up:

- It's too much work to conceive and set up a review program.
- It's too much work to have a review program.
- The whole thing is a pain in the butt.
- I don't want to bother my customers asking for reviews.
- It's too complicated.

Yes, these excuses keep repeating themselves, but are they really valid?

It's too much work to have a review program – Then don't. Google online reputation management and find a site like Birdeye, Reputation Studio or ReviewInc and let them do the heavy lifting for you.

It's too much work to conceive and set up to have a review program – Maybe yes, but probably not. If you let someone else set it up for you, it's easy. If you don't want to do that, pick one, maybe two dedicated people on your staff and delegate it to them exclusively. That way, they learn and know exactly what to do, and the other members of your staff aren't walking around dazed and confused over the whole thing.

The whole thing is a pain in the butt – This is a subjective excuse. The set-up probably seems overwhelming, which makes the whole process look difficult and time-consuming. There is so much to consider to get up and running.

Please turn to page 23

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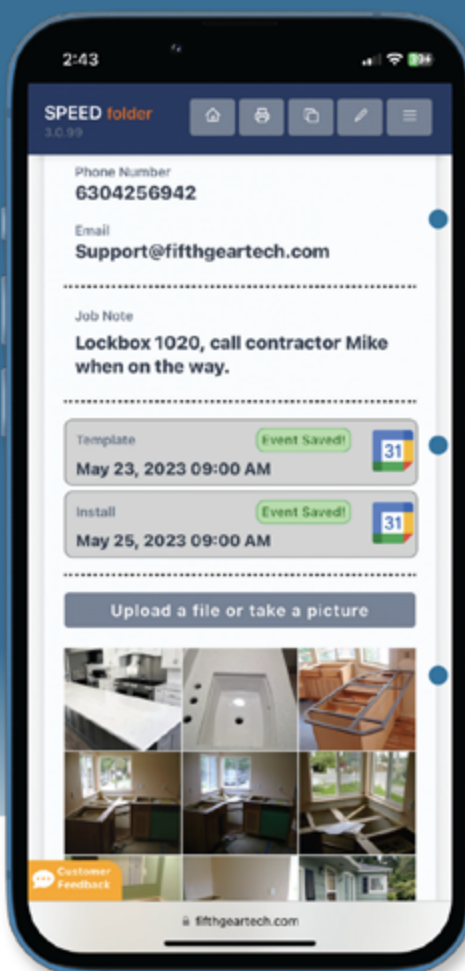


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TRAINING & EDUCATION

2023-2024 NTCA Reference Manual Now Available

The NTCA Reference Manual – an annual compendium of standards-based industry wisdom, tips, and techniques in a cause/cure/prevention format – is now available! NTCA Members are currently receiving this 338-page volume as part of their membership, but other industry members can obtain their copy at the NTCA Online Store at www.tile-assn.com/store/default.aspx in print or in PDF format.

Users can browse the table of contents for the issue they are dealing with and find recommendations as to what caused the problem, what to do to fix or cure it, and how to not do it again – prevention. It is chock full of photographs that illustrate the issue in question or the proper way to address the situation.

There are also numerous sample letters on various topics, with an index on page 337. They have been written and vetted

by contractors, architects and attorneys to contain accurate information that offer precautions and recommendations to general contractors, glass installers, design professionals, homeowners and the like. Tile contractors can add their logos and signatures to customize the letters, and give them to the appropriate party to document cautions and recommendations, potentially saving hassles and headaches down the road and providing documented protections for tile contractors.

The NTCA Reference Manual is updated annually, through two meetings of the NTCA Technical Committee each year – a coalition of leading experts in the tile, stone and allied products industry, organized into various committees. The NTCA Technical Committee continually works to update, revise, perfect and add new documents to the publication. Meetings of the NTCA Technical Committee are open to the public and take place at Total Solutions Plus in



October, and at Coverings, in April 2024.

Changes are made at the discretion of the Committee members. Both Becky Serbin, NTCA Education and Curriculum Director, as well as Dan Lambert of NTCA Five-Star Contractor Member Lambert Tile and Stone, Eagle, Colorado, have invested countless hours in updates and revisions in this edition – an ongoing process.

Editorial updates and additions to the 2023-2024 NTCA Reference Manual include:

Editorial updates

- Chapter 2 Substrates, 21
- Chapter 3 Membranes, 83
- Chapter 5 Thin-Bed Method Installation, 111

New additions:

- Handmade Tile Installation, 240
- Handmade Tile Installation Techniques and Tips, 241
- Mesh Mounted Mosaics in Wet Areas, 222
- Profiles, 35
- Profile Issues for Tile and Stone Installations, 36
- Pressed Cement Tile, 236
- Pressed Cement Tile Maintenance issues, 239

This year's NTCA Reference Manual cover features the work of Lambert Tile and Stone of Eagle, Colorado, depicting the "Mountain Glam" project, which won the contractor the 2023 Five-Star Project of the Year Residential Grand Prize. The ambitious project involved installing over 3,300 square feet of gauged porcelain tile panels (GPTP) throughout the home. More images of this award winning project can be seen throughout this edition of the NTCA Reference Manual.

The NTCA Reference Manual joins the TCNA Handbook for Ceramic, Glass and Stone Tile Installation and the ANSI Manual, as one of three essential industry publications that provide guidance and grounding in standards-based tile and stone installation. Get yours today at www.tile-assn.com/store/default.aspx.

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“Courage is not the absence of fear, but the ability to face it head-on and proceed with determination.”

—Rudyard Kipling

TRAINING & EDUCATION



[Continued from page 12](#)

Host these at your shop! It's a great way to get people in the door.

In conclusion, marketing is the backbone of any successful countertop shop. By implementing these top 10 marketing tips, you can create a robust strategy that encompasses both digital and offline efforts. A professional website, effective SEO, engaging social media presence, and a focus on customer reviews and testimonials are the foundational elements that can draw potential customers in.

Building partnerships with interior designers, creating captivating visual content, and participating in industry events further solidify your brand's presence. Moreover, nurturing a loyal customer base through email marketing and offering educational workshops can establish your countertop shop as an authoritative and trustworthy source in the field. By combining these strategies, your countertop shop can not only survive but thrive in a competitive market, ultimately achieving sustained growth and success.

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.

What Doesn't Kill Ya...

A woman in suburban Detroit said she got a scare when she discovered a live frog in a container of spinach purchased from a grocery store.

Amber Worrick of Southfield said she bought the sealed Earthbound Farm spinach package earlier in the week from a Meijer store,

WJBK-TV reported. When she got home, her daughter found a live frog in the container and screamed, Worrick said.

"It was alive and moving," Worrick said. "Just thank God I didn't eat the frog."

Worrick said she immediately returned the package and the frog to the store. Workers there released the frog and gave her a refund, she said.

The TV station's video showed the frog in a sealed container.

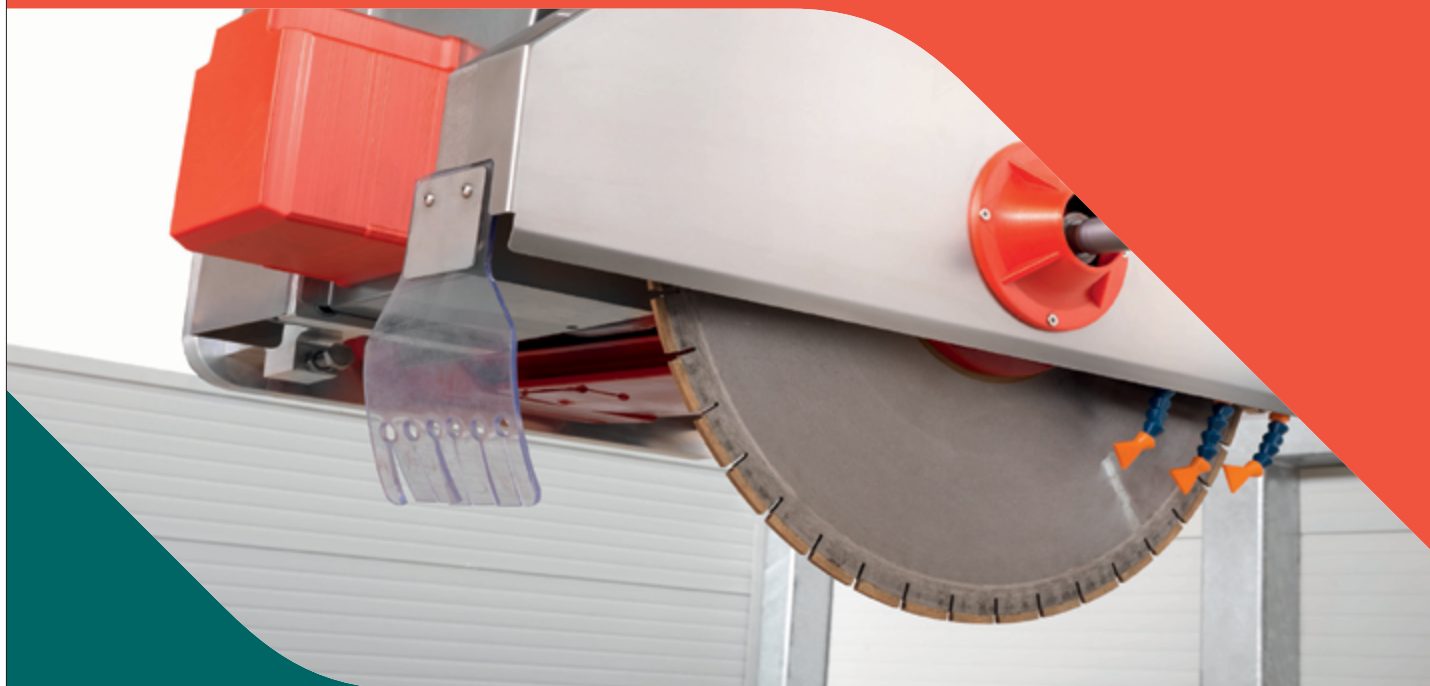
Jennifer Holton, a spokesperson with the Michigan Department of Agricultural and Rural Development, told the *Detroit Free Press* that the store shouldn't have released the frog because authorities now don't know whether it's native to the state.

She said the department referred the incident to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Meijer officials said the frog was relocated to a new home outdoors.

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I Think that I Shall Never See a Ghost as Scary as a Tree

Graveyards and creepy houses don't faze me. Trees, however, can be another matter.

Sam Venable
Department of Irony



Perhaps this is due to guilt from years of chain-sawing trees asunder. Or maybe it's just my nutty noggin. Could be both.

But when I'm deep in the boonies on a dark, chilly autumn night, it doesn't take much imagination to see haints staring back. Especially when owls are hooting and wands of Spanish moss sway in the wind.

I once frequented a place like that. It was a cypress swamp in Cameron Parish, Louisiana, where I worked on a book in the 1970s. At dusk, it turned into a scene worthy of Hollywood.

This wetland had lots of spooky cred. According to local legend, Jean Lafitte and his fellow pirates once roamed there. What's more, it supposedly was haunted by the ghost of a woman who had killed her

drunken, abusive husband.

She was the great-aunt of Watkins Miller, a leather-skinned hunting guide who lived nearby. Watkins told me the story he'd often heard as a child.

During one violent episode, the bully attacked his poor wife for the last time. I

can still hear Watkins' Cajun voice as he described what happened: "Bam! Bam! She hit him right in de chest wid both barrels of a shotgun. She was afraid her husband's people would come get her. She ran into de swamp and hid in a cypress stump. A buzzard flew ovah, real low. She t'ought it was her husband's ghost. She ran deeper into de swamp and was nevah heard from again."

That, gulp, was the same cypress swamp where I hunted deer many an afternoon.

Trust your Uncle Barney Fife: When exiting at dark-thirty, it was easy to be dry of throat, rapid of heartbeat and quick of step. The occasional cottonmouth was less worrisome.

Don Orr, a long-ago friend from West Tennessee, once shared a woodland ghost story of his own. Driving through the Obion River bottoms late one night, he rounded a curve and nearly ran into a ditch.

"Across the road was a huge monster with bony arms raised over its head!" he exclaimed. "Its eyes glowed, and smoke was comin' out of its mouth!"

When his pulse finally slowed, Don got

out and cautiously approached.

"Somebody had been burning off that piece of ground," he said. "The 'monster' was a hollow tree that was on fire inside. The 'arms' were upper limbs, and its 'mouth' and 'glowing eyes' were old limb and woodpecker holes. It liked to scared me to death."

It's not even necessary to have deep woods for vegetative fright.

Overlooking a field near my house is a sure-nuff "monster." It formed when vines overtook a utility pole and the wires attached to it. I watched it take shape all summer.

(Note to self: Even though I know this is nothing but leaves and branches, stay away from this field on Halloween. A man can't be too careful.)

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.



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Stone Restoration and Maintenance Corner

Honed Marble and Limestone Countertops

AS we have discussed before, more and more honed countertops are becoming common in residential settings. This is especially true of marble and limestone counters. If you haven't run into one yet, you will. This is actually a good thing, especially on calcium-based materials, as both etching and scratching don't show up nearly as bad on honed surfaces as they do on polished surfaces. Honed surfaces are usually easier to maintain as well.

Just because a surface is honed doesn't necessarily mean it won't show etching and scratching, it just doesn't usually show it as much. Of course there are different levels of hone, each with different appearance and reflective properties. A typical honed surface is normally between a 200 grit and 400 grit but there are levels both lower and higher in grit too. It depends on the particular material as to what grit level of hone both looks and performs best.

The higher in grit level the surface profile of a particular material is, the more vivid or bright the natural colors of the stone become.

Bob Murrell

M3 Technologies

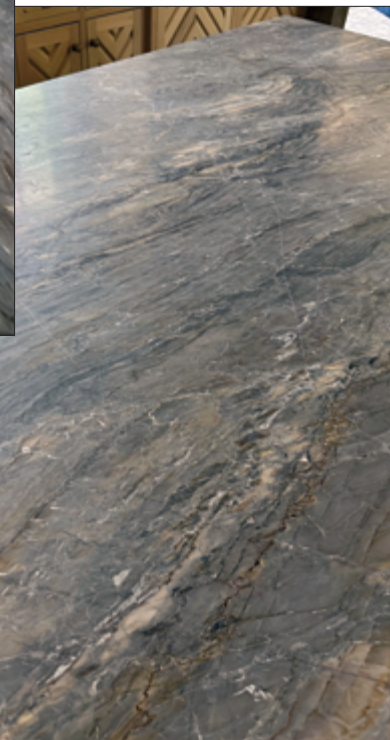
Photos by Bob Murrell

A naturally polished surface is the most color enhanced a material can be, even though added resins can add color. So, a happy median for a honed surface is, like I said, very commonly between a 200 grit and 400 grit surface profile level. I do run across higher levels of a honed surface, say 800 grit all the way to just below a polish. These will show more color and shine but also etching and scratching issues become much more noticeable than they would on a lower level of hone.

With a honed surface, the scratch pattern is part of the surface profile. A polished surface has very little to almost no surface profile, being almost monolithic. So the honed surface has more exposed surface area and therefore more exposed open and interstitial pores. With more exposed pores, the more likely the surface is to absorb staining materials, especially fats and oils. Therefore, honed surfaces will need protection in the form of an impregnating sealer, preferably an oleophobic (oil and grease resistant) type. The Majestic Low



The scratching is so deep on this limestone countertop that you can catch it with your fingernail.



Overall view of the damaged surface. Just because a surface is honed doesn't mean it won't show etching and scratching.

Odor Solvent-Based Impregnating Sealer, which does not produce an offensive smell, is very effective at stain resistance. Other quality brands like the Akemi line of products can also be effective. On lower levels of hone (say 200 grit and below), color enhancing impregnators can be used to bring out more of the stone's natural color.

Even with the use of a quality impregnating sealer for stain prevention, etching can and will continue to occur. Impregnators penetrate the surface and help keep foreign liquid contaminants from entering the pore structure of the material. They will not prevent etching from acid etching on the surface. They will help keep the acid from penetrating, keeping the etch more so at the surface. This can make for easier etch repair going forward.

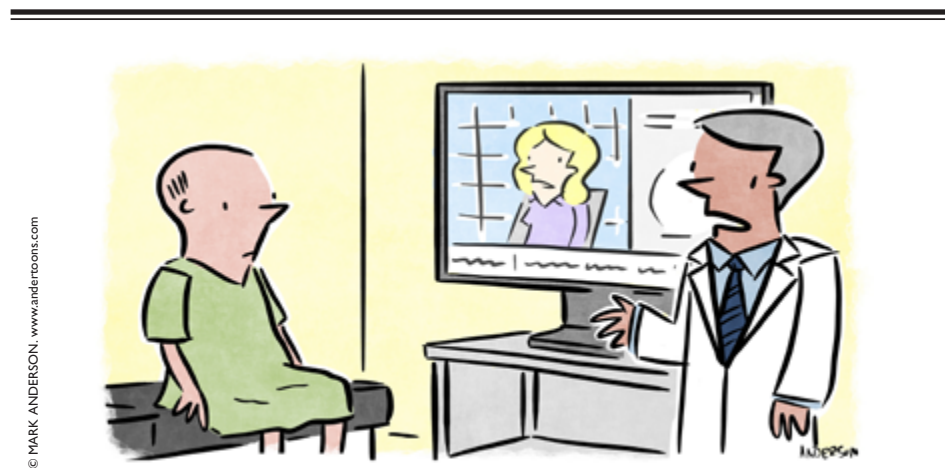
A couple of very high-end honed limestone and marble (really a metamorphic limestone) counters were recently refinished due to excessive etching and scratching, which had accumulated over the years. Remember, even with a good impregnator applied, these countertops will still etch and because of their hardness level (3-4 on the Mohs scale), they will scratch too.

On one countertop some of the scratching was deep (your fingernail could catch it), so the initial grind in these areas (where heavy scratching was present) was a 120 grit Flexible ELF series metal-bond, under a Makita variable speed polisher. Care was taken to keep the 5" discs flat, to avoid a leading-edge pattern and/or gouging. A 220 grit Flexible ELF was then used, and then feathered out a little more. Finally, a 200 grit PLP diamond impregnated pad (dip) was used to feather out and bring the surface to a consistent level of hone. The 200 grit PLP was used on the entire surface.

[Please turn to page 23](#)



Julie running a 200 grit ELF5 Flexible Metal-Bond 120 grit on the heavily scratched and etched areas.



"This is a new stress test. We just put on the news."

Mark Saxe Receives New Mexico's Award for Excellence in the Arts

IN August 2023, my colleague at Divine Stone, Mark Saxe received the 2023 New Mexico Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts. He is among a handful of artists to be so honored. His award recognizes his artistry as a stone sculptor and his many years of teaching and mentoring stone carvers emphasizing hand carving.

For more than four decades a prominent and diverse group of painters, weavers, sculptors, dancers, musicians, storytellers, poets, actors, playwrights, potters and supporters of the arts have been honored.

Mark was born in Chelsea, Massachusetts, served his country in Vietnam, and while traveling in Europe, discovered his love of stone. Completing his MFA on the GI Bill, he became an apprentice stonemason before moving to New Mexico to open his stoneyard and begin his long career as a sculptor. He has lived in New Mexico for 43 years.

Roger Murphy *Divine Stone*

Mark is an author, lecturer, curator and member of the Stone Carvers Guild of North America. Mark's connection to the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine goes back some 35 years.

In His Own Words

"My connection to the stoneyard began in the late 1980's when John Barton, AIA, the son-in-law of the Dean of the Cathedral, James Parks Morton, invited me to see the stone working program. I was offered a place to stay in the Bishop's guest quarters and visited the stone shed attached to the cathedral several times.

"John introduced me to the cutters and carvers. I remember no names, only the intensity and dedication that showed in the faces. It was likely that I met Jose Tapia, Tim



Left to Right, Mark Saxe, Betsy Williams (Workshop Co-Director, Professional Ceramicist, and Mark's Wife), Kazutaka Uchida (Guest Artist), Roger Murphy.

Smith and Eddie P. They were working... cutting and carving some of the thousands of stones necessary to complete the Cathedral's towers. I wished I was one of them, but it was not to be, living in New Mexico with a stone masonry business that needed me and I needed it. However, my connection to the stoneyard has continued since that tour.

"The light filtering down from the skylights, the fine dust of limestone in the air

and the tap, tap, tap of hammer on chisel was mesmerizing. The vibe was intoxicating, especially to me who had already spent the last 13 years working with stone. I would have traded places with any of those carvers but I had a home and business to take care of. Upon leaving the Cathedral I had a feeling that we would meet again in the future.

Please turn to page 20

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The Stone Detective

The Case of the Three Definitions of Granite

IT was one of those mornings. I was sitting at my favorite greasy spoon enjoying my cup of joe, talking— or should I say flirting — with Flo, and listening to the Admiral’s same old stories.

Just as I was about to take another bite of my Taylor ham and egg sandwich (those from New Jersey will know what I’m talking about) I overheard this loud voice coming from one of the booths. I turned around to see who it was a recognized him right away. I won’t mention his name other than to say he was one of the stone and tile industry self-proclaimed know-it-alls. Don’t get me wrong, he is a nice guy and somewhat knowledgeable but, every once in a while, I catch him spouting off on some outright made-up, what I call fantasy facts. Or should I say Fake Facts (LOL). Just as he was telling the people he was sitting with, he looked up and saw me sitting there. He motioned me to come over and join him. I picked up my cup of joe and what was left of my sandwich and reluctantly went over and took a seat next to him. He introduced me as the Stone Detective and told his party that I would confirm what he just told them. Here we go, I thought, this is going to get interesting. He started with the fact that granite is granite and there is only one definition for granite. He went on and on, reciting the geological description of granite, and then said that if anyone tells you any differently, then they don’t know what they’re talking about. He looked at me and said, “Am I right?” He stared at me, looking for a firm Yes. I was about to agree with him so I wouldn’t have to argue and then I thought what the heck. I stood up and said, “Yes, he is 100% correct if you’re a geologist, but in the stone industry there are actually three different definitions for granite.” Without hesitation I went into my lecture mode and blurted out the following:

“Every October I’m kidnapped and forced to scare birds at a local pumpkin patch.”

—Conan O’Brien

Dr. Frederick M. Hueston, PhD

Granite can be defined in different ways depending on the context.

Commercial Definition: In the commercial context, granite refers to a broad category of natural stone used in construction, architectural applications, and countertops. Commercially, granite often includes a wide range of igneous rocks with varying mineral compositions. It is commonly classified as granite based on its appearance, durability, and suitability for specific applications.

This commercial definition is broader and may encompass rocks that geologically may not meet the strict criteria for granite. As I said this, I winked at our know-it-all friend. Commercially classified granite may include rocks that are technically gabbros, syenites, or other similar types, but they are marketed and sold as granite due to their similar appearance and performance characteristics.

Geological Definition: From a geological standpoint, as my friend pointed out, granite is a specific type of intrusive igneous rock with a specific mineral composition and texture. Geologically defined granite is composed primarily of three essential minerals: quartz, feldspar (usually orthoclase or microcline), and mica (usually muscovite or biotite). It typically forms through the slow cooling and solidification of molten magma deep within the Earth’s crust.

Geologically defined granite exhibits a granular texture with visible interlocking mineral grains. The rock’s mineral composition and texture distinguish it from other types of igneous rocks. This geological definition is more precise and reflects the specific characteristics of true granite.

US Customs Definition: However, if you’re importing granite, the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has its own specific classification for granite. According to the CBP, granite is defined as “a crystalline rock consisting of quartz, feldspar, and mica.” This definition aligns with the geological definition but simplifies the criteria for customs purposes.

Please turn to page 20



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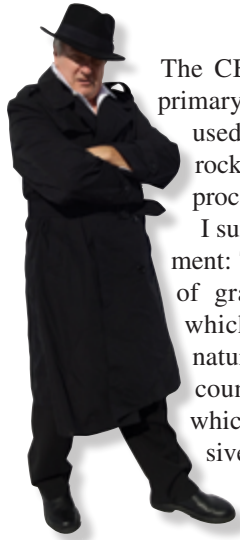


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The Stone Detective

Continued from page 19



The CBP definition focuses on the three primary minerals present in granite and is used to differentiate granite from other rocks and materials during import/export processes.

I summed it up with the following statement: There are three common definitions of granite: the commercial definition, which encompasses a broad range of natural stones used in construction and countertops; the geological definition, which refers to a specific type of intrusive igneous rock with quartz, feldspar, and mica; and the US Customs definition, which simplifies the geological criteria to classify granite for import/export purposes. I tapped my friend on the shoulder, tipped my fedora to his guest, grabbed my coffee and headed back to the counter for another cup of joe and perhaps an apple turnover. As I walked away, I thought of the following quote I once heard: “With a perfectly timed quip, I managed to deflate the know-it-all’s argument like a balloon at a cactus convention – leaving them both deflated and wondering how they ended up in a thorny situation!”

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.

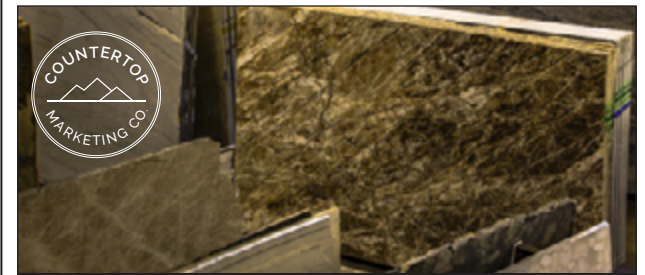
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Mark Saxe Receives New Mexico's Award for Excellence in the Arts

Continued from page 18

That experience had a profound affect on me and because of it I met many people who worked on the cathedral, most notably Joseph Kincannon, Nick Fairplay, and John Barton. All of them have added to my life and work.” – Mark Saxe

Mark Saxe's Workshops

I met Mark some 16 years ago when I was working in a stoneyard in Santa Fe, NM. Eventually I was able to enroll in his Stone Carving Workshops. The workshop was seven days of intensive hands on carving with appropriate demonstrations by Mark and his staff.

Thank you “Chief” for all you have done to impact New Mexico and the stone world.

For more information, visit Mark Saxe Sculpture – <https://www.marksaxe.com/portfolio> and Sax Stone Carving – <https://www.saxstonecarving.com>.

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JANUARY 2024 ISSUE

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2023

Ads not meeting guidelines will not be published.

For Sale

Matrix Sebring Gantry Saw \$20,000 obo. 17 ft length overall, 138" cutting stroke, Saw Bridge feed 1/2 HP motor with variable speed control, Motor: 20 HP. Arbor Shaft Style. Only selling because we upgraded and don't have room to store it. Machine has been disassembled and ready to go. Freight not included. Contact: Cheryl Chapman, Setinstone@gmail.com.

Park SS 150. 1998 Stone Shaper 150 with table. Good Working condition as will assist in shipping. \$40,000. Contact: Jason, 913-371-7757, jason.speer@sturgismaterials.com.

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GMM Litox. Selling one of our GMM Litox 5 Axis shaping machines. The machine is currently under power and can be inspected. Please contact if interested to obtain further information. Link to product: <https://www.gmm.it/en/dettaglio-prodotto/5-axis-shaping-machines/litox-1000-cn2/>. Contact: Custom Architectural Stone, Inc., Infocustomarchstone@gmail.com.

Savage Bridge Saw. Works great. 20 HP Blade Motor. 360 Degree Rotating table (no tilt). 3 phase power. Motorized Gantry, Traverse, and Rise & Fall Motions. (does not miter). Works great, we are upgrading and we do not have room for it. \$3,000.00 USD OBO. Contact: Keith Shishnia, 605-225-3679, graniteworks1960@gmail.com.

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Business Opportunities

Successful Granite Fabrication Shop for Sale in Tenn. Cumberland County Tennessee continues to grow each year, and has a very large retirement community. No other local fabricator shop! All other tops in area are sourced out of county, a lot of business to be had. We stayed 4-6 months out in manual shop. Contact for details of equipment, materials, and tooling available. Also, willing to stay on for a while to train. Contact: McGinnis Tile and Stone, 931-787-1156, mcginnistile@gmail.com.

Countertop Showrooms For Sale

Established North Alabama business with a focus on quality work and excellent reputation/reviews. Owner started the business in 2006 and wants to retire. Business has two showroom locations in high growth areas with ready made staff to support sales and service. Owner will provide help for smooth transition. Seller financing is available, however subject to final approval. Call 256-864-8050 or email info@nscountertops.com.

[com](http://www.com) for additional information.

Custom Stone Fabrication Business For Sale. This Central MN business has an excellent reputation for quality work. The owner has been in the business for over 44 years, started this business in 2015 and is selling for personal reasons. Sale includes all the equipment, 16' Morgan Box truck, showroom displays, furniture, computers and software, etc. Owner will provide help for smooth transition. Real estate is leased and can be purchased. Phone: 320-251-9300, sdevine@warnert.com.

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Shop Foreman. Looking for a self-motivator person to assist in building our company. Must have CNC experience and Auto Cad would be an added feature. Must have experience using a Donatoni CNC bridge saw, and a Flow Water Jet. Must be able to communicate with customers along with motivating and directing 4 employees. Compensation will be equal to your experience. Health and Yearly bonus included. Contact: Michael Germono, 1-408-431-8033, mike@baysidecommercialcaseworks.com.

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STONE INSPECTION & TROUBLESHOOTING

Stone Forensics will again be offering its popular Stone and Tile Troubleshooting workshop. The next class will be held January 2024 in Las Vegas, Nevada, presented by Dr. Fredrick M. Hueston. The program is designed to teach the basics of investigating stone and tile installation failures.

"The amount of failures, poor installations and other issues with stone and tile flooring are on the rise. This seminar is perfect for restoration and installation contractors as well as architects, building engineers and maintenance staff who have to deal with stone and tile installation and restoration," says Dr. Fred.

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Help Wanted — Naples, Florida Jim Lytell, Inc. is hiring for Marble and Stone Restoration Technicians. Will train, but experience preferred. Looking for a change? Call us today! Good driving record a must! Drug free company. \$18-\$30 . Contact: Jim Lytell, Phone: 239-948-3000. Email: office@jimlytellmarble.com.

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Stone Restoration Corner

Continued from page 17

The next countertop was a much more compact material and had less deterioration than the previous project. Also, the client desired more of shine but not quite to a complete polish. This countertop was honed with a Flexible Metal Bond 400 grit and then a 1500 grit PLP Diamond Impregnated Pad. The high level of hone achieved, without a full polish, was outstanding.

Once the restoration of the countertops was completed, each was impregnated with Akemi Color Intensifier. This helped to enhance the natural color of each material. The Akemi Color Intensifier is also a good impregnator for improving stain resistance. I like this particular Akemi product as it tends to penetrate denser stones like these and give some color enhancement. The higher in grit the surface is taken to, the harder it is for a color enhancing impregnator to penetrate and therefore work like it should. Color enhancing impregnators are typically designed to work on surfaces with more surface area than a polished surface, like textured and low honed surfaces. This is especially true of denser materials. It did, however, work well on the high-honed dark countertop.

The two countertops were completely different stones but in the same calcium-based metamorphic class of materials. As you can see from the photos, each countertop turned out very nice. Clients were extremely satisfied. They also know that their stone surfaces will need periodic restoration to reverse any accumulated etching and scratching from routine use. This is a good trait of these surfaces, they are easy to restore. This type of project is what helps to give a restoration contractor repeat business, almost like a subscription service. This is a good thing, indeed.



Finished restoration on the higher honed darker material.

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, 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.



The final high hone look on the island. Notice the Tape & Drape, masking, and portable wall for protecting the surrounding surfaces.



Final results in this kitchen, after using the Akemi Color Intensifier.

Reviews Are Here To Stay, So Get Onboard

Continued from page 13

Where do I want reviews to go? Google? (Yes) Facebook? (Yes) Yelp, Angi, etcetera, etcetera? Yes! Who will handle the process and set it up? Who do I ask to review my business? How do I ask? Do I send links? How do I get links? Who can help me? However, once the system is up and running and in use, it can almost go on autopilot, making it not so much a source of pain and stress.

I don't want to bother my customers asking for reviews – This is now probably the least valid reason to not have a review program. Since just about everyone is asking for reviews these days, we are inundated with requests, and most of us are even surprised when we aren't asked to give one. We have been programmed over time and by circumstance to understand that giving reviews is just a part of our daily existence. And truthfully, when we are researching a company, we look for them and we read them, at least some of them, to see the reputation of the company we are exploring. We're used to it...just do it!

It's too complicated – It can be if you make it that way, but it doesn't have to be. There are 3, if not more, very simple ways

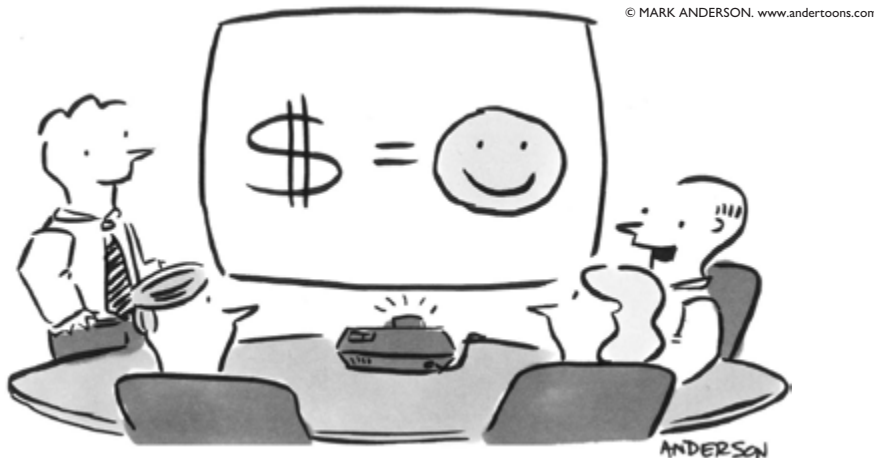
to grab reviews. Make a QR code (you can do this online, or your website host can help you) for the site you want a review on and print it on a post card. Give or mail the postcard to customers and ask for a review. Or create a link to the site you want the review on and include it with your thank you notes or print it on a postcard and mail it or give it to your customers. If you email thank you notes, put the link in the email. Another very simple idea is to make a QR code and display it in your showroom in various places and ask customers to scan it and leave a review. That's about as simple as it gets.

More and more people are reading reviews every day. We write them. We read them and we are wary of anyone that doesn't have them. Google loves them. They can help you be seen on Google.

Besides getting them, you need to keep them current and respond to them when someone takes the time to write one.

It's 2023, soon to be 2024. Start or ramp up your review program. Reviews are here to stay, so get onboard!

Please send your thoughts and comments on this article to Sharon Koehler at Sharonk.SRG@gmail.com.



"I LOVE your business model!"

Natural Stone Institute Completes Two Homes with Gary Sinise Foundation

The Natural Stone Institute has provided natural stone and fabrication services for two homes 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. Army First Sergeant John Borders were provided by Cosentino and Distinctive Surfaces of Florida.

On January 5, 2006, after a year-long tour of duty in Iraq, just six days before he was scheduled to return home, then-retired U.S. Army First Sergeant John Borders was participating in a routine convoy when his Humvee was hit by an improvised explosive device (IED), critically injuring him. He was scheduled for surgeries every other day for several months, receiving over 55 surgeries total. The extent of his injuries required him to go through limb salvage with his left leg and have his right leg amputated below the knee.

With the help of family and friends, and his own self-imposed drive to return to active duty, staff sergeant Borders stayed positive, working through sessions with his physical therapist until he regained more use of his limbs and learned to walk with a prosthetic limb. Then, he learned to run. Every time he achieved a goal, he set himself two more. After more than three years, staff sergeant Borders completed his Medical Evaluation Board and returned to active duty as a counterintelligence special agent. Borders served over 27 years in the army, 12 of which he served

as a handicapable individual. He deployed five times, completing his last tour in Afghanistan with his new leg. In January 2018, he retired as a first sergeant, a title he aimed to achieve his whole career.

Today, Borders lives in Florida with his wife, Mollie (also an Army veteran), and their two children, Brittany and Xander. Post-retirement, Borders has found a new way to serve others, redefining himself as a scuba instructor. He wants to help individuals with limited mobility learn to dive and find freedom from their pain and restriction in the deep water.

Natural stone and fabrication for U.S. Army Captain Jason Church were provided by Terrazzo & Marble Supply, Grazzini Brothers & Company, Halquist Stone, and Eden Valders Stone.

Jason is a third-generation soldier. He moved from La Crosse, Wisconsin to Fort Benning, Georgia for military education, going through infantry officer basic leader course, Ranger School, and Airborne School. After graduating, Jason moved to Fort Lewis, Washington, and deployed to Afghanistan shortly after.

On August 23, 2012, Jason was out on his first deployment to Afghanistan. While conducting a routine patrol with his unit, it quickly became clear that Jason and the others were walking into an ambush and standing in a field of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED). Sensing the urgency to vacate the area, Jason attempted to knock over a wall to create an escape route; however, a loud explosion rang out, knocking Jason unconscious for a few seconds. Once waking up from the blast, Jason quickly realized that the IED had severed both of his legs below the knee. With his unit's help and their medic, Jason was



US Army First Sergeant (ret.) John Borders with wife Mollie, daughter Brittany and son Zander.



US Army Captain (ret.) Jason Church is a third-generation soldier.

“Candy was my whole life when I was a kid. The first ten years of my life, I think the only clear thought I had was ‘get candy.’ Family, friends, school; they’re just obstacles in the way of the candy.”

—Jerry Seinfeld



transferred to a MEDEVAC site and eventually to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. Upon arriving at Walter Reed, Jason spent two and a half months in in-patient care while enduring 20 surgeries to save his legs and his life.

Today, Jason is retired from the Army and lives in Wisconsin. He attended the University of Wisconsin- Madison and graduated with his law degree. In his off time, Jason enjoys traveling, fishing, and spending time with his family.

Natural Stone Institute members have now contributed to 49 completed homes through this initiative. Companies interested in getting involved with future projects are encouraged to email 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.

The Natural Stone Institute is a trade association representing every aspect of the natural stone industry. The current membership exceeds 2,000 members in over 50 nations. The association offers a wide array of technical and training resources, professional development opportunities, regulatory advocacy, and networking events. Two prominent publications—the Dimension Stone Design Manual and Building Stone Magazine—raise awareness within the natural stone industry and in the design community for best practices and uses of natural stone. Learn more at www.naturalstoneinstitute.org.

Durat Publishes Environmental Product Declaration for Solid Surface



Durat and CaraGreen, the trusted source for healthier building materials, are pleased to announce that an EPD, or environmental product declaration, is now publicly available for Durat's complete line of solid surfacing. An EPD is an important step in a company's journey to becoming more environmentally sustainable and transparent.

Durat is a unique solid surface material used to create colorful, durable counters, furniture, sinks & tubs. Durat surfaces are non-porous & show no seams, making them easy to clean & customize. Durat consists of up to 28% recycled hard plastics diverted from the waste stream and is 100% recyclable at the end of its life through Durat's take-back program.

The document includes a cradle to gate life-cycle assessment and is third-party verified. The results of the study list the environmental impacts of the material from natural resource use to end of life. The report includes indicative metrics such as global warming potential, smog creation, ozone depletion and water pollution. Durat hopes that this disclosure will help purchasers and specifiers make more

informed decisions when designing with solid surfaces.

You can view the entire report on CaraGreen's website. Samples of Durat are always available through CaraGreen, Material Bank, and Swatchbox. Contact CaraGreen for a quote or more information, www.caragreen.com.



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WANT TO JOIN THE ARTISAN GROUP?

The Artisan Group is an elite North American partnership and network of independent countertop professionals, that are looking to grow their group. Each Artisan member is an owner of the group and enjoy the benefits of the group with protected territories allowing the exchange of best practices.

The Artisan Group members were among the first stone fabricators in the world to achieve full accreditation with the Natural Stone Institute, with each member rigorously tested on quality, safety, and service.

Currently we are looking for new companies to join the group's partnership in the following areas:

Southern California	St. Louis, MO	Mississippi
Las Vegas, NV	Jackson, WY	
Indiana	Orlando, FL	
Louisville, KY	Oklahoma	

To learn more about becoming a member contact Jon Lancto: jonl@Artisan-counters.com

The Artisan Group is facilitated by our member partner Architectural Surfaces.



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