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Fast-growing Rustic Nail to get exposure on HGTV program

By DON SERGENT dsergent@bgdailynews.com Oct 23, 2019

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It started with a pile of scrap barnwood and a dream. Now Bowling Green's Rustic Nail design and build company has a barn-sized pile of accomplishments and a dream-come-true exposure on a highly rated television program.

Rustic Nail founder Kyle Cochran has been traveling to Hilton Head, S.C., in recent months to work on the latest home to be featured on the HGTV cable channel's "Dream Home" program.

"They bring together the best designers, contractors and landscapers," Cochran explained. "I did some pieces and some labor for them. It was a neat experience and will definitely be a huge platform for us."

The latest of many.

The "Dream Home" program featuring Cochran's work will air Jan. 1 and will only add to the impressive resume of a company that grew from that scrap lumber into a designer and builder of cutting-edge creations at Starbucks, Texas Roadhouse, Steamers Seafood and Hickory & Oak.

Not bad for an enterprise whose owner will tell you: "I never thought I'd be a business owner, ever."

Cochran never cracked open a macroeconomics textbook or took an entrepreneurship class, but his forays into engineering and architecture and the creativity and artistry that were instilled in him by his family inevitably led him to create a business that now employs four artisans.

It all started with that pile of wood.

A 2002 Greenwood High School graduate, Cochran studied architecture and engineering at Western Kentucky University and then went to work for Scotty's Contracting in Bowling Green.

"I had a pretty set future (at Scotty's), but I always felt that there was more for me," said Cochran, 35. "I'm not necessarily a dreamer. I just wasn't all-in for my future there. In the back of my mind, I felt there was something else."

He found it in 2012 when his mother, Kim Cochran, an interior designer, came up with some free barnwood that got his creative juices flowing.

"Rustic Nail started with a pile of free barnwood," Cochran recalled.

He began making furniture and other items out of the wood and discovered that there was a market for his creations.

"I've always been a doer," Cochran said. "I was raised to figure out how to fix things. My dad was good about handing me the tools and letting me try things. I messed up a lot of things."

And he got a lot of things just right for clients who appreciated Cochran's ability to create fixtures that were out of the box but somehow in tune with his clients' wishes.

Cochran's creativity drew other wood and metal artisans to him as Rustic Nail grew.

"He started it, and we became brothers from different mothers," said Jason Barr, Rustic Nail's first employee.

"I had worked at Bass Pro Shop, collecting the pieces you see hanging in the stores," said Barr, who approached Cochran about coming to work for him. "That interested me, and it was well-suited to working at Rustic Nail.

"Kyle is sometimes a little crazy, but we do a lot of really cool things."

Some of the coolest have come right in Cochran's hometown, although Rustic Nail is branching out more every day.

Interior design work at Steamers Seafood, which includes a 45-foot-long copper fish, helped put Rustic Nail on the map and led to more clients looking for similar off-the-wall projects like a 28-foot light fixture in a Chicago Starbucks and a metallic tree sculpture and other creations in Hickory & Oak.

"The trees inside Hickory & Oak were very difficult to do in metal," Cochran said. "That was a pretty substantial accomplishment. It's amazing, when you have that vision, what you can accomplish. That

creative flow just keeps building.”

Cochran encourages that vision and creativity among a staff that now includes wood and metal artisans Barr, Aaron Wilson, Matthew Black and Jonah Essig.

Together, they have helped the company grow to the point that Cochran says his revenue last year was 162 times what it was in 2013.

“Every employee I have, came to me,” Cochran said. “They’re the best, most skilled craftsmen I’ve ever known. They’re doing things that are intriguing. There’s no way someone could tell us what we’re going to do tomorrow.”

Cochran may not know what Rustic Nail’s next project will be, but he now knows who some of his regular customers will be. Rustic Nail is now a licensed corporate vendor for Starbucks and is doing regular work at Texas Roadhouse locations.

The company has also landed a contract with the Restomod Air company that makes custom aftermarket air conditioning systems for custom car builders. Rustic Nail is building a custom booth that Restomod Air will use at November’s Specialty Equipment Market Association convention in Las Vegas.

Rustic Nail is growing in other ways, with Cochran planning to add 4,000 square feet to the company’s headquarters on Nugent Street as well as adding some more employees.

That space and those workers will be part of Rustic Nail's latest project: a rollout of its own furniture line that will include more than 100 different products.

"We'll be doing online orders, and we'll have retail locations in big cities and one here in Bowling Green," Cochran said of the furniture venture.

"We're going to be hiring maybe four individuals to do nothing but furniture."

It will only add to a growth curve that Cochran admits is sometimes hard to keep up with.

"We're so busy right now that I'm turning down jobs that three years ago I would have loved to have had," he said.

There's no end in sight for Rustic Nail's growth, but Cochran doesn't plan to outgrow his hometown.

"I'm pulled to Nashville and Atlanta," Cochran said. "But this is where I want to be. I'm not going anywhere, ever. I love Bowling Green."

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