

Knifemaker seeks perfect blades — Former cook crafts, sharpens cutlery in global business

By ROLF BOONE

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OLYMPIA — Like all entrepreneurs, Olympia resident Bob Kramer determined a need in the marketplace and decided to meet it.

The result is a knife-making and sharpening business that is so popular that customers wait up to seven months for one of his handcrafted kitchen knives.

"If it's not perfect, it's not leaving," said Kramer, who can spend up to 40 hours making one knife from his one-man shop in Olympia.

Kramer determined there was a need for a better knife after he spent the first 12 years of his professional career working as a cook and kitchen manager, including a stint in Seattle at the Four Seasons Olympic Hotel.

He started the next stage of his career by first sharpening knives for Seattle restaurants and later learned to make his own knives.

After his restaurant career, he opened a cutlery store in Seattle's Pioneer Square and operated it from 1993 to 2000. Since then Kramer has moved the business twice, first to Ferndale and next to Olympia, where it has been for a year.

Along the way, the business has developed loyal customers who have been willing to wait for his knives, Kramer said.

Seattle Chef Gray Brooks praised Kramer's craftsmanship.

"He makes every single knife as if it were the last knife he was going to make," said Brooks, who works at Seattle's Dahlia Lounge.

Though Kramer has moved from Seattle to Olympia, Brooks said he would rather ship his knives to Olympia for Kramer to sharpen them than find a Seattle replacement.

"It's worth it," Brooks said.

Redmond-based Lisa Dupar Catering Executive Chef Marc Van Mulken also agrees that Kramer makes a quality knife.

"One of those knives is a knife for life," he said.

Kramer Knives

Business: Manufacturer of kitchen knives

Owner: Master bladesmith Bob Kramer

Cost: An eight-inch Kramer chef knife can cost about \$750

Production: 12 to 40 hours spent per knife

A good year: Making 200 knives

Steel: Kramer uses tool steel. He calls stainless steel "spiritless."

Customers: Professional chefs and those who like to cook

Markets: North

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