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Corvallis couple piece together puzzles for kids

Dec. 25, 2010, 12:01 a.m. PST
 Associated Press

CORVALLIS, Ore. (AP) — Marvin and Margaret Jack first started making puzzles in the early 1980s with a single pedal-powered scroll saw. In the decades since, their product line of custom-made puzzles hasn't changed much; but their business has grown.

Still popular are wooden puzzles ranging from simple peg puzzles for \$17 to a complex 13-layer jungle masterpiece that sells for \$700. Another favorite is a detailed puzzle of monarch butterflies with two layers, for \$300.

At any time, the Jacks have about 25 puzzle designs available.

"We try to have something for everybody," Marvin, 56, said. The cost is mostly labor, to painstakingly cut and paint by hand. Each ends up both a piece of art and a toy.

They built up the business out of their south Corvallis house and shop while raising their two children, Alleya and Noah.

The business' reputation grew along with the children, and now the Jacks produce more than 3,000 puzzles a year under the name Kid Puzzles. Some sell locally, but many more are shipped to customers across the United States and Canada.

The work happens in a shop next to the Jacks' house on Crystal Lake Drive in south Corvallis. They use a scroll saw to cut puzzle pieces and a shaper to finish the edges in one room. The other side of the building, accessed through a storage room packed with inventory, is a painting space complete with a ventilated hood for spray painting, drying racks and a design table with a light box.

Customized puzzles that include the recipients name spelled out in puzzle pieces are a top seller.

"That's probably half our business," Margaret, 53, said.

The longest first name the couple will put on a puzzle is 11 letters, such as "CHRISTOPHER."

This year's most popular name might be Avery. Out of an order for about 100 puzzles earlier this fall, 10 were Averages — "From all over the country," Margaret said.

The couple also recently started making three-name puzzles and puzzle stools, which proved to be popular. Marvin said about 30 have sold in the past month for about \$50 each.

"It was pretty encouraging," he said.

Marvin does most of the designing and all the cutting. Margaret does all the painting.

"There's a lot of detail in what she does," Marvin said.

The couple travels the festival and craft fair circuit each year, ranging from their booth to the Corvallis Fall Festival and throughout Colorado, Wyoming,

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Idaho, Utah and Arizona to as far away as New Orleans and Pennsylvania.

They combine work with pleasure, camping and kayaking. Marvin often seeks out contra dances during their travels — another passion.

They've been on the festival circuit for so long, they're now making puzzles for the children of the children who once received one from them. Adult customers tell them that although they've thrown out many of their childhood toys, they still own the puzzles that the Jacks made.

Maybe that's because even the puzzles' makers find them tough to solve. In fact, one of their pet peeves is when someone knocks over a puzzle at their festival booth.

"Then you have to spend the whole afternoon putting it back together," Marvin said.

Making the puzzles also is time-consuming. The Jacks have a sign in their workshop, noting that the minimum hourly wage is \$8.40.

"It's the wage we're really shooting for," Marvin deadpanned.

The couple has finished producing puzzles for the holiday rush. Now they will fill online orders and stockpile puzzles for next spring's festival season.

Marvin has begun work on a new series of bird-themed designs including a Sandhill Crane, pelican and blue heron. The couple also recently donated about 80 extra puzzles to Vina Moses, as they do every year at this time.



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Marvin and Margaret Jack have been making wooden puzzles in their Corvallis workshop since the early 1980s. The Jacks sell the puzzles from their website and at art and craft fairs around the western United States.

ANDY CRIFE
CORVALLIS
GAZETTE-TIMES



Pieces have fallen into place for Corvallis puzzle makers

Wooden toys | The Jacks of Corvallis have watched their business grow since the 1980s

By **NANCY RASKAUSKAS**
GAZETTE-TIMES

CORVALLIS — Marvin and Margaret Jack first started making puzzles in the early 1980s with a single pedal-powered scroll saw. In the decades since, their product line of custom-made puzzles hasn't changed much, but their business has grown.

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