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### SPOTLIGHTING MANUFACTURERS AND MAKERS IN CARROLL AND JO DAVIESS COUNTIES

# Galena Mill & Steel

## A Business with Lots of Angles

If you asked Galena Mill & Steel to build you a “Stairway to Heaven,” owner Ryan McClain would most likely stroke his flowing beard in thought, cock his head, and then agree to at least draw up the plans for it for starters, based on your directive.

The recently re-branded Galena business, previously known as Woodshed Mill and Metalworks, has evolved over the past year and a half into a fine-tuned, high-end designer, developer and manufacturer of custom furniture, stairs, handrails and more.

“We design and fabricate high-end custom wood and metal residential and commercial projects,” said Ryan. “We can accommodate single pieces and large commercial products.”

For Ryan, Woodshed Mill and Metalworks was a jumping off point in 2000 where he started his career in residential carpentry, building houses and specializing in custom trim work and kitchen cabinets. In 2004 he also enrolled in an ironworker’s apprenticeship program through the Local 89 Iron Workers Apprenticeship in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, excelling in fabrication and welding. The program assigns on the job training for the apprentices, and in Ryan’s case that meant working the majority of it for Cedar Valley Steel. From there his creativity grew into projects that evolved into more unique and creative products that incorporated wood and steel in new, distinctive ways.

And when Ryan says unique, he also means it in an “old school” way as well. There is no CAD/CAM (computer-aided design/computer aided manufacturing) software used to design Galena Mill & Steel products. All his designs are drawn by hand and based on his own engineering and architectural experience and skills.

According to Ryan, the software technology boasts that it can do it all, but it cannot take into account the human reality or envi-

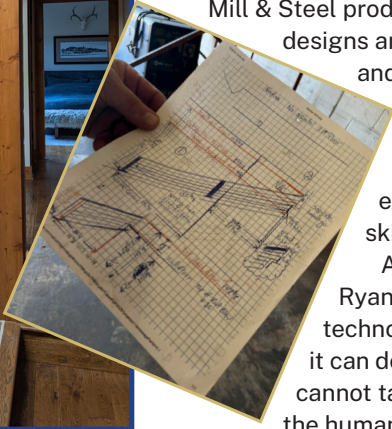
ronmental variables that come into play when creating a design that is error-free or fits the need. And when there is that kind of computer generated error “things get worse and more expensive” he says.

“You can’t teach a computer what hands-on experience can do,” he said. As a result, that’s exactly one of Galena Mill & Steel’s biggest attributes and Ryan’s particular niche.

“I think the unique thing about our business is our experience and creativity, which sets us apart from other custom job shops,” he said.

Galena Mill & Steel occupies two locations. In 2016 he opened his home-based sawmill operation on North Cross Road - and yes, he’s a lumberjack as well as a journeyman ironworker. His fabrication shop, which opened in 2023, is housed in two gigantic areas he leases from the Lemfco building in downtown Galena, on the Water Street side. The areas themselves are huge works in progress for optimum usage, but they are already as useful as they are big. Here the work is big and dirty and producing amazing products.

The company’s client base is generated from all the usual ways: his on-line



footprint through his website and Facebook page, from fellow contractors and of course, satisfied customer referrals. While most of his clients are from the overall tri-state area, they have shipped pieces to Florida, Chicago, Maine and San Francisco and have even done custom installs as far away as Nevada.

Galena Mill & Steel also has a unique employee base.

"I'm actually blessed for employee availability," Ryan said. "We at times have up to two full-time employees depending on the workload."

Through a twist of fate, Ryan is tapping into another source of part-time help. In 2024 the East Dubuque High School shop teacher passed away. And through word of mouth, Ryan was asked to help fill the teaching gap.

"I looked at that as an opportunity to help," he said. After all, I was a shop kid."

As a result, Ryan has been teaching mornings at the East Dubuque High School: welding, woods, engines and introduction to building trades.

"I'm a problem solver," he said. "We don't build bird house in my shop class. I bring some of my small projects to the classroom and use them for teaching opportunities."

Students with aptitude may even end up on his payroll in various part-time capacities honing their new skills and



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learning a trade.

In an effort to beef up his on-line presence, which he now manages himself, he is wanting to tap into local college student multi-media and digital programs that are interested in helping him by marketing his business and using it as a learning platform.

The future for Galena Mill & Steel appears to be limitless.



As if Galena Mill and Steel isn't enough for Ryan McClain - he's also the poster boy for Lumbersnacks Barbecue with his signature plaid shirt and flowing beard that often sports sawdust from a day at his sawmill. Ryan and his wife, Sabrina, launched a successful barbecue sauce business in 2022.

Spearheaded by Sabrina, who is the Director of the Lynch Disability Resource and Culture Center at Loras College in Dubuque by day, the mother of their three children had also spent a lot of time experimenting and perfecting the special dietary needs a few of the children have. Together with Ryan's skills as a chicken wing and rib barbecuer, they were able to perfect a great tasting product.

"Sabrina wanted to make a barbecue sauce," he explained. "We didn't want to just cater to wing or rib people, so we made a sauce for barbecue people."

The name of their business evolved rather easily.

"I came in the house after a long day at the sawmill full of sawdust," said Ryan. "The first thing my wife said was 'You look like a little lumber snack.'"



"We would like to grow our footprint and our workforce in the next few years," Ryan concluded. "If we can't make a particular piece of the project, we have business relationships in place that allow us to complete projects outside of our own abilities. Our two guiding principles are: have the audacity to ask 'why not' and lazy questions don't solve problems."

The couple started conversing with other local food entrepreneurs and finally developed a winning sauce

that was taking them to area farmer's markets, fairs and trade shows. Even Ryan's sister, Lindsey Duve, is part of the enterprise.

Once the trio perfected the recipe they connected with a Hudson, Wisconsin, company called Croix Valley Foods who shared the same

goals and philosophies on producing all natural, gluten-free products. All branding and distribution happens through them.

"It was great for us because it lent a lot of legitimacy to our products as well," Ryan said.

Today Lumbersnacks has an on-line presence via their website at [www.lumbersnackbbq.com](http://www.lumbersnackbbq.com) and a social media profile on Facebook. While customers can buy on-line, they are currently in 15 "mom and pop" stores and locally at Piggly Wiggly and Hartigs in Galena, E Town Coffee in Elizabeth and HyVee in Dubuque.



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