Dudley takes old-fashioned approach to outdoor furniture

By **Chloe Beaver** on Wednesday, September 18, 2024

Moss Creek takes hands-on approach to outdoor furniture



A custom-made cupholder is included in a recent swing order. Ross Dudley began teaching himself about woodworking technique during his time with the Athens Clarke-County fire department. (Chloe Beaver/The Oglethorpe Echo)

Inside the Moss Creek Swings workshop, customers will discover old license plates, World War II memorabilia and plenty of sawdust.

It's all part of the process for Ross Dudley, who said he operates his business "the old-fashioned way."

Moss Creek Swings specializes in high-quality, handcrafted outdoor furniture. From Adirondack chairs to swing racks and farm tables, each piece is tailored to customers' needs.

"If you have a picture of it, we'll just about try it," he said.

Although Dudley has "been turning in there all (his) life" off Athens Road in Winterville, working with wood hasn't been his only vocation, but "kind of an evolution."

Dudley's career began at a financial company, until he grew tired of the monotony of an office job.

"I realized I just didn't like working at a desk," Dudley said.

He transitioned to the Athens-Clarke County Fire Department, where he was a firefighter for 28 years. In fact, Dudley was with the fire department when his hobby turned into a regular stream of project orders.

"Me and another guy, both of us, worked at the fire department," Dudley said. "We started doing landscape work ... we couldn't find anybody to build the stuff that we needed, so I just started building it myself."

In 2000, Dudley said he "really started building stuff."

"I just did it," he said. "We would sell them, and we got to selling them a lot."

It wasn't until 2005, when the digital age started to compete with Dudley's hands-on approach to firefighting duty, that he decided to retire from the department.



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"I came down one day to get off a shift, and they were measuring the cab of the truck for a computer," Dudley said.

A computerized GPS system replaced phone navigation across the department.

"If you got a ballgame going, them regular routes, that ain't the way to go," Dudley said. "I don't know if that computer could tell us or not. I don't want to deal with that, so I retired."

By that time, Dudley and his buddy had already established themselves in the world of local outdoor furniture making. As a retiree, Dudley could dedicate more time to his craft.

When customers place an order, Dudley said he sits down with them to "rough it out a little bit, and we go from there."

Dudley said his business relies on word of mouth and loyal, repeat customers. And with an influx of orders every week, Dudley remains busy in the workshop.

"I've got a shop at my house," he said. "I stay backed up for about four or five weeks."

Without a desk and with little assistance from a computer, Moss Creek Swings accommodates Dudley's old-fashioned spirit.

"I'm retired, so (work) could be anywhere from six o'clock in the morning till I just decide not to work that day," Dudley said.

Even with an outdoor furniture business keeping him busy, Dudley is reluctant to call himself a business owner.

"Call me what you want. Just call me for supper," Dudley said. "It's kind of a hobby that makes money."

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