

Printing pioneers

Alton company recognized as Business of the Month

November 22, 2013

FRED POLLARD *The Telegraph*



Kevan and Marsha Bennett, owners of B&B Custom T's and Gifts in Alton, were surprised to learn their shop was awarded the River Bend Growth Association Business of the Month for November. The company was started by the couple in 1989. Kevan and Marsha Bennett, owners of B&B Custom T's and Gifts in Alton, were surprised to learn their shop was awarded the River Bend Growth Association Business of the Month for November. The company was started by the couple in 1989.

ALTON – Kevan and Marsha Bennett, owners of B&B Custom T's and Gifts, will be a bit more proactive with their award than most winners of the RiverBend Growth Association Business of the Month.

“We will be making our own plaque this month,” Kevan Bennett said, laughing. “We appreciate the honor, however our main focus has always been to put out a good product and provide the best customer service we can.”

“We really appreciate what (the RBGA) does for the community,” Marsha Bennett added.

B&B Custom T's provides T-shirt printing, promotional products, banners, signs, plaques, trophies, window decals, business cards, mugs, gifts and more. It prides itself on offering small, personalized orders in addition to large orders, the owners say.

“When we first started our business, we were kind of pioneers in that we would take on one- and two-shirt orders,” Kevan said. “Back then it was hard to find places that would do that. Now it is a huge industry.”

One area the Bennetts say personalized shirts are popular is when memorializing loved ones.

“When the rapper 2Pac died, everyone turned up at his wake with his picture on their shirts,” Kevan said. “Over the last 20 years, it has evolved into a popular thing.”

“It is often tied to some tragedy, and I believe it is part of the healing process,” Marsha added.

The couple started B&B in 1989, operating out of the Alton Expo, and later during the holidays in Alton Square before opening its first location on Delmar, where the Avalon Hair Studio currently stands. Helping the young business owners in those early days was James Bernhardt, Marsha's father.

"When we started, we had to take individual letters and lay them out by hand," Marsha said. "The letters would come in kits. If you dropped the box, you were a day-and-a-half putting all of the letters back in the right slots."

In 1997, the business moved to its current, more visible location at 2714 Corner Court, near Golden Corral. The services offered have expanded to include embroidery, screen-printing, promotional products and graphics, and more. Marsha uses state-of-the-art embroidery machinery, and Kevan utilizes a new custom decal machine that can tackle full-color and custom-cut graphic orders.

"We have even put pictures on quilt squares for people, and with our new machine, we can now do multi-color and contour-cut decals," he said.

Using the latest technology to keep the business up-to-date also allows for timely orders.

"We work fast," Marsha said. "We have a lot of resources now that we did not have then, which helps. Often, people can come in and get something the next day...occasionally even while they wait."

"The average on a large order is a week to 10 days," Kevan added. "We try to never go over two weeks. Under-promising and over-delivering is a good way to work."

In spite of the humorous and sometimes snarky quips and sayings on signs scattered throughout the shop, the Bennetts say they actually love dealing with the public and take pride in going that extra mile.

"We bend over backward to take care of people," Kevan said. "You cannot put a price on a good name."

"Anybody can print a shirt," Marsha said. "When a customer comes here, they get that extra customer service touch. Customers come in here and say, 'I hate to bother you, but...'. That is what we are here for.

"We have awesome, loyal customers. They recommend us and send business our way, and that word-of-mouth is the best advertising you can get.

"We love hearing, 'I have looked all over town, and I can't find—oh, wait, you've got it.'"

Also on hand is employee Shawn Yates, who has provided customer assistance for the last two years.

B&B Custom T's is open from 9:30 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, staying open until 6 on Fridays, with extended hours over the holiday season.

For more information, call (618) 463-0443 or visit the website at www.bbteespromo.com.