

The Columbus Dispatch

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Tool sharpeners never have a dull moment

By Michael Leach
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A midlife career change keeps one Columbus woman on the cutting edge.

Louise Radanovich sharpens kitchen knives, scissors, pruning shears, shovels, hoes, chain saws, reel lawn mowers and commercial landscape gear in her mobile workshop.

Her truck's walls are lined with workbenches and shelves neatly stacked with the grinding wheels, files, clamps and other tools needed in her work.

The translucent roof fills every crevice with natural light.

Although other mobile sharpeners cater to barbers and hairstylists, Radanovich makes house calls.

After three decades in landscape and tree care, the 50-something arborist wanted less physically demanding work to ease into "geezerhood."

Inspiration for the new venture came from a memory of her childhood in 1950s Detroit.

"An old man propelled a grindstone-in-a-box apparatus on a bicycle frame," she said. At the sound of his ringing bell, housewives came out of their houses with their dull scissors and knives.

"I've merely updated and added internal combustion," she said of her business, Sharpening on Site.

Radanovich had her first tool-sharpening lessons as a child while visiting her grandfather on a farm in Wisconsin.

She gained more experience while working for 14 years on the landscape crew at Wayne State University in Detroit. She was a supervisor when she left in 1989 to launch a tree-care business.



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Louise Radanovich makes a final check of the blades.

In 1992, she moved to Columbus and started Trees by Louise, specializing in topiary (trees and shrubs sheared into fanciful shapes) and espalier (trees trained to grow flat in geometric patterns against a wall or trellis).

Depending on the number of tools and knives, Radanovich spends one to two hours at a customer's home. She is especially busy in spring sharpening garden tools and around the holidays sharpening kitchen tools.

"Everyone apologizes for the state of their yard and hand tools," she said. "People who have clean tools don't use them, or else they're as compulsive as I am.

"Half the battle is cleaning them," she said, using a barbecue-grill brush to scrub the muddy blade of a lawn-edging iron. She first sprays a mix of wintergreen rubbing alcohol to clean the implement and kill plant pathogens.

"I love taking it apart, shining

it up and restoring," she said.

With proper care, a tool should last generations. But many contemporary tools are unlikely to attain heirloom status.

People use tools "until they get dull and buy new ones," said Mike Kent, owner of Rivers Edge Cutlery on the Northwest Side. "For a fraction of the cost, we can sharpen them."

Sharpeners charge from \$1 to \$3 for knives, \$3 to \$5 for hand pruners, \$3 to \$5 for loppers, \$4 to \$6 for grass shears and \$7 to \$10 for hedge trimmers.

Sharp tools are better for the plant because they make clean, quick-to-heal cuts, Radanovich said.

Sharp tools are easier and safer to use, too. Dull tools force people to exert more pressure, which increases the risk of the tool slipping and causing injury, Kent said.

Janet Helgeson is delighted at the difference working with pruners Radanovich sharpened.

"It's a whisper-quiet cut, and you can do it with half the effort," said the Bexley woman. "You get a sharp tool and everything you look at needs pruning."



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Sparks fly as Louise Radanovich sharpens an edging iron on a belt sander.