

# SHARPENERS

## R E P O R T

*April, 2006*

### **UNTRADITIONAL, SHE REVIVES 'TRADITION' OF SHARPENING WITH MOBILE LAWN SERVICE**

After 13 years of owning her own tree trimming business, Louis Radanovich of Columbus, OH, was facing some hefty capital gains taxes when she sold the business. Her accountant advised her to start or buy another business.

"So I asked myself, 'What can a middle-aged woman do by herself?' And definitely, no employees," Louise recalled. Because of her love of tools and with thousands of clients and customers from her tree trimming days, she decided to open a mobile sharpening business that emphasized lawn and garden tools. In the planning stage for two years, Sharpening on Site has now been up and running for another two years.

Sharpening on Site is a completely mobile service. While that is not unusual, Louise's main customer base is. "Numerically, the largest segment of my customer base is homeowners."

Working by appointment, Louise goes to the homeowner to sharpen their knives, lawnmower blades and other tools. She has a \$25 minimum charge, but says she usually exceeds that because the homeowner will keep producing more and more tools for her to sharpen from their kitchen or garage.

Just the presence of her truck seems to generate more business. "A neighbor will stick her head inside my truck and ask if I can sharpen some things for them," Louise said.

"Older men in particular love to look at the truck. It's the tool shop they never had," Louise said. "Invariably, they'll pull out their pocket knife. I'll fuss over it and sharpen it for free. Then a few days later, I'll get a call from the man, asking if I can get come by to sharpen more tools."

Louise does all of her sharpening on site. She drives a 2004 Chevy cutaway van that has a 6 X 6 X 12 box with a translucent roof "so I have natural daylight."

### **SURGICAL SHARPENING SCHOOL**

There is something new under the sharpening sun, and it's a new Surgical Sharpening School!

This event, July 19-20, will immediately follow Bonika Shear's annual scissors jam, and will be held at the Bonika Shears office in Duluth, GA, a suburb of Atlanta.

If you've considered entering the potentially lucrative field of medical sharpening, this two-day class will cover the how-tos of sharpening tools used in medical, dental and veterinary offices.

The instructor will be Debbie Finck of Portland, OR, who also is the instructor on Bonika Shear's Surgical Sharpening DVD.

The registration fee of \$900 covers breakfast and lunches, tools to sharpen and a training manual. For more information, please call Bonika Shears at 888 290-3393 or you may call Debbie Finck directly at 503 720-8494. *(Details on Bonika Shear's scissors jam are on page 2.)*

Louise spent hours and hours planning out the layout of her mobile shop on graph paper. Inside, she has a 1 X 42 belt sander, a Jet heavy duty horizontal grinder, two Twice as Sharps, a Tru Hone, a Foley Belsaw lapper for reel mowers, a drill press, a small air compressor, a saw chain grinder, two Delta grinders, a knife serrator and an array of cordless tools. Everything runs off of a Honda generator.

She also found room for a porta-potty and a small closet for clean shirts. Many of the tools are on tracks so they can be pulled out for use and then pushed back out of the way.

Lawn tools are notoriously messy and Louise says it's a challenge to keep her shop clean. She's planning to install a central air vacuum system. "But I'm constantly cleaning up, sweeping up, and wiping things down. I am compulsively neat. In fact, that is my claim to fame with my customers. They get their tools back in immaculate condition."

Louise has devised an ingenious method for soaking tools to clean them before sharpening. Using three heavy square kitty litty buckets as anchors, she mounted three PVC tubes with threaded, sealable tops into each. The tubes are all long enough to hold lawnmower blades and saw chains. The tools are then placed into the tubes for soaking.

"I have Simple Green in one. A product called Greased Lightning in another. The third is my rinse bucket and holds water or windshield wiper fluid in the winter."

When Louise started, she relied on her customer base from her days as a tree trimmer. But she has expanded her business through scheduled events at greenhouses and nurseries, and through gardening clubs and farmers markets. When she donated 4 gift certificates to a public radio auction, she was inundated with phone calls from people wanting her service.

"And I'm on Angie's List. I have a "super service provider" designation," she said proudly. (Angie's List is a web-based home-owner referral

service in about 20 major cities throughout the U.S.)

As the weather turns colder and the lawn tools are put away for the year, Louise focuses on knife sharpening.

She also maintains a meticulous log on each customer and spends the slow time in the winter hand addressing postcards reminding customers to have their tools sharpened. The personal touch pays off. "Three out of 4 customers are repeat customers," she said.

Louise said many of her older customers say her service reminds them of the days of the pushcart sharpener, a reaction she loves to hear.

"My advice for anyone would be to go mobile," she said. "Mobile services are what's happening. And as the Baby Boomers get older, mobile services will only keep growing."

## **SCISSORS 'JAM'**

Mark your calendar now for Bonika Shear' annual Scissors Jam Session, which will be July 16-17 at the Atlanta Marriott Gwinnett Place in Duluth, GA.

As always with this popular event, there is no monetary charge to attend – it's free! However, all attendees are required to share at least one sharpening-related tip with the group.

The tip-sharing Jam Session will be on Sunday, July 16. On Monday, there will be a series of sharpening educational sessions.

- Stepping up to Success. Building Your Scissor Business in a Systematic Way by Ron Roemer of New Hampshire.
- Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about the Scissor Business and Didn't Know Who to Ask. . . Until Now. A panel of sharpening experts will field any and all questions on scissors sharpening.
- What to Do with Scary Shears by Debbie Finck. This cover advanced flat hone sharpening techniques.