

## Dennis Nelson Retires as Local Electrician

Dennis Nelson, owner of Dennis Electric, Inc. has retired from electrical work after serving the Vernonia region for over twenty-five years.

Nelson, who turned sixty years old this past year, cites a very slow economy as one of the main reasons for his retirement. "It has always been difficult making a living as a small town electrician," says Nelson. "We have too many miles between customers and not enough people to service. And the collapse of the economy has just made it that much more difficult. We are just not getting enough work."

Nelson describes it another way: "We have priced ourselves out of our market-- no one can afford to hire us, and we are not charging enough to cover our costs, so it's a double bind."

He also notes that the lack of any new home construction in the region has really hampered his business.

Nelson recently attended a retirement seminar that he was invited to as a member of his electrical workers union. At that seminar, Nelson learned that he was eligible to begin drawing from his union retirement which made financial sense in these tough economic times, rather than continuing to fight what Nelson describes as an "upstream battle" to keep his business solvent.

Shutting down his business was

a hard decision for Nelson. "We felt like we needed to continue to serve the community where we lived, working for the people we know—our neighbors and our friends. That's why we did what we did for as long as we did. I sort of feel like I'm abandoning my post in some sense."

Nelson began doing electrical work during the summers as a youth. He helped his father who worked in Clatskanie and Rainier for another electrician. When he graduated from high school, Nelson enrolled in an electrical apprenticeship program, which he completed in four years. He spent two of those years gaining large project experience working on the Trojan Nuclear power plant, which he described as a great opportunity to learn. "It was a radical change going from a three man electrical shop where we wired houses, to a huge project that was probably one of the largest construction projects in the world," explains Nelson. "It provided quite an education and was a very interesting experience."

After graduating from the ap-

prenticeship program in 1974 Nelson worked locally on some other large area projects including work at the Longview Weyerhaeuser mill and at the Beaver Army Dump near Clatskanie. While working at those projects, Nelson, says

a chance to car-camp and see the country that way."

Nelson learned that he didn't really like working on those types of really large electrical projects. He became interested in logging and his ancestors involvement in that industry and he started visiting friends he knew in Vernonia. He met up with John Ragsdale, a local timber faller, and Nelson spent the next seven years working in the woods.

Nelson's father, also named Dennis, had started his own electrician company, "Dennis Electric." Dennis senior passed away suddenly when Nelson was in his mid-thirties, and realizing he didn't want to, and couldn't work in the timber industry all his life, Nelson and his wife Schann took over his father's business.

Nelson has now run Dennis Electric as a small town, family business for the last twenty-five years. But it has now come to an end

Nelson is currently living at the Keasey Tree Farm outside of Vernonia and acting as the caretaker. When asked about his plans for his new retirement, he says he is looking forward to spending more time managing the Keasey property. "That is my plan right now, to continue here in this capacity."



he met what were called "tramps" or "travelers" in the electrical field, workers who moved around the country from big job to big job. "As a member of the Union, I found out you could call up any Union Hall in the country and find out if they had work and go there and be sent out on jobs," says Nelson. "At that time there were nuclear plants and coal fired power plants being built all around the country and I had that experience, so I worked on two or three of those and had

## KaptansKraft: Custom Garment Printing in Vernonia

Are you part of a group, club or team that needs to get T-shirts printed? How about a special event you'd like to commemorate? Or a special gift for someone? Well, now there is a place right in Vernonia where you can get those shirts and more made for you or your group.

KaptansKraft is custom garment printer that can create high quality silk screen T-shirts, sweatshirts, hoodies and more for your group, at a reasonable price. And now they have a store front in Vernonia located at 711 Bridge Street, so they are easy to find and convenient to work with. They can also do heat transfers at the shop while you wait.

Kirk Avilla and his partner Linda Gomez opened the shop in downtown Vernonia in early December just in time for the Christmas shopping season. But Kirk has been creating silk screens in his garage for over a year. This past year he decided it was time to expand and become more visible. "The retail store started as an afterthought and as a way to use leftover



shirts," says Avilla.

Creating silk screen T-shirts is not new to Avilla—he started back in the 1980's designing and selling concert T-shirts in the parking lots of rock music shows. He took up the craft again after he moved to Vernonia in 2007. After the flood in 2007 he refurbished his garage, which was flooded. In the last year he has been taking on silk screen projects for local groups and events and adding to his equipment.

The garage is where the bulk of his business is conducted. Silk Screen printing can be a slow and laborious process, especially in a mostly non-automated shop. "I give a lot of attention to each job," says Avilla.

Avilla has completed several large local projects including shirts for Birkfest this past summer, for Vernonia EMS, the sophomore, junior, and senior class shirts for the Vernonia High School Homecoming this past year, the Vernonia Free Wheelers, All In Pub and Eatery, Vernonia Jamboree and more. They will also be printing for Big Gun Logging, a new local outfit on the television show Axmen.



Kirk Avilla in his workshop where he produces silk screen garments. Avilla recently opened a retail storefront in Vernonia called "KaptansKraft."

"Vernonia has stepped up and supported us beyond anything we expected," says Avilla about the growth of his business.

One way that Avilla keeps costs down for his customers is by not charging set-up fees. "We're a small family business and that's the way we want to stay," says Avilla. He does hope to grow the business and take on some larger projects in the future, which could mean hiring a production crew.

KaptansKraft is located at 711 Bridge Street in Vernonia. You can reach them at 502-433-4278 or kavilla@kaptanskraft.com.

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