

THE Wood-MizerWay

HOPE AND HARD WORK AT SECOND CHANCE RANCH

For the Boys

WOOD-MIZER SAWMILLS PROVIDE AID IN NICARAGUA

Coming Together

UNIQUE APPROACH TO NATURAL LOG PRODUCTS

Keeper Enterprises

A MENNONITE LIBRARY CONSTRUCTED FOR ENERGY-EFFICIENCY

Faith and Formation

Wood-Mizer
Thin-Kerf



Regular
Circular Mill



Wood-Mizer



Keeper Enterprises

By: Jack Petree

At 8000 feet above sea level, on the continental divide near Buena Vista, Colorado, Keeper Enterprises demonstrates that a forest products firm doesn't have to be an industry giant to set high standards for innovation and environmental enhancement. In Buena Vista, Keeper utilizes thin kerf sawmill technology in unique ways to both extend the forest resource and to broaden potential markets for the log home industry. As a result of Keeper's work, greenhouse gas emissions to the atmosphere are being reduced, waste avoidance is being practiced, harvests in healthy forests are lessened and, log homes are made more affordable and, thus, more available to the public.

Log Home Products

In 1974, Larry Banning was working for wages. Seeing opportunity in a rising demand for natural log products, Larry founded a log furniture business – Keeper Enterprises. Larry's son, Chris, then a high school student, worked with him peeling bark from logs, assembling, and performing other chores.

After high school, Chris went off to college and then, to Boston and a sales job but, in 1989, Colorado called, and he decided to return and take his turn at the family business along with his sister, Judy. The increased effort eventually led the firm into the housing construction industry through the crafting and installation

*Unique Approach
to
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Above: Chris Banning's home, built by himself from products created by he and his dad, is a showpiece for the beauty and look of the company's product.

of residential log products including trusses, railings, roof systems, siding and stairs.

Initially, logs were custom processed through a hired Wood-Mizer LT30 to produce the natural log products for which the company was becoming known. By 1996, an increased demand, and a need for flexibility in production, justified purchasing and operating a company owned mill - the LT30 the contract sawyer was already using to service Keeper's needs. In 1999, after many hours of productive use, the Bannings sold that machine and purchased a new Wood-Mizer LT40 with a hydraulic log handling package. The upgrade was designed both to meet production demands and to eliminate much of the heavy lifting involved in milling logs without the aid of hydraulics.

Today Keeper Enterprises utilizes their thin-kerf, bandsaw mill to produce a variety of custom designed natural log siding products primarily from dead or dying Englewood Spruce, Lodge Pole Pine, and Ponderosa Pine trees afflicted with pine beetles in Colorado.

Staying in Business with Unique Products

Chris says owning a Wood-Mizer has become essential to his ability to stay in business. Many of Keeper's products are unique and cannot be purchased anywhere else. He comments that as production increases, it is important to be able to process to a timeline without relying on someone else or working around another's schedule.

Chris further asserts his Wood-Mizer is the key to creating the company's unique products. He says, "We have developed ways of making precise cuts to produce one-piece dovetail siding and full round siding that the flexibility of the bandsaw enables us to do. A circle saw mill simply would not work."

The creativity in their product line and the manufacturing techniques Chris and his dad have developed to create those products is impressive. One of Keeper's signature offerings is a half log siding with full log tails that, when installed onto conventionally framed houses, creates a look indistinguishable from a whole-log home.

Keeper is also coming to be well known in their market area for a siding line including



Chris (L) and Larry (R) quality check a timber milled on their Wood-Mizer LT40.

a 3/4" tapered natural edge siding and a unique one-piece 1 1/2" hewn log siding featuring a 6"x10" dovetail that, as far as Chris knows, no one else is producing. The company also produces log railings, stair treads, fireplace mantels, roof structures and other natural wood products.

The Bannings operate their Wood-Mizer as a stationary sawmill. The bed of the mill has been extended to 40 feet to enable the firm to cut very long pieces of lumber. Chris explains, "We cut extra long lengths of siding for customers who are willing to pay a premium for the installation of 'seamless siding' on their homes."

The Best of Both Worlds

Chris says Keeper's products are installed on homes that otherwise use conventional construction because he sees several financial and environmental advantages the technology can provide over whole-log homes. According to Chris, "Conventional homes have no

continued on page 26

Below: Keeper creates unique markings on the Wood-Mizer milled wood with a special tool so that the look of a hand hewn log could be mimicked to some extent.

Bottom: Keeper Enterprises prides itself on using wood that, in previous years, would have been discarded or underutilized and crafting it into premium products with enhanced value.



settling issues, no air infiltration problems, are easier to wire and plumb, and they offer more choices for contractors and fewer conflicts with building inspectors. When half log or log siding products are installed over a conventional framework, you get the best of both worlds.” The techniques, he points out, provides the beauty and nostalgia of having a log home without sacrificing the efficiencies of conventional construction.

Chris’ 2,400 square foot home stands as a showcase for Keeper’s products and construction practices. A two-story engineered structural panel house, the home features dovetail log siding, a round log roof and truss system, log entry trusses and half log gutters. One of the most beautiful log homes most people will ever see, the structure is actually an energy efficient modern home constructed at less cost and with fewer hassles than log homes will typically entail.

Future Expansion Possibilities

Chris sees a future and growing market for his company’s siding products and looks forward to expanding production in the near future. “Dad and I have put our heads together and after about four variations we have figured out how to produce the most lumber from each log and to be most efficient in our sawing operation so we are ready for expansion.”

As an example he points to the processed developed for producing their dove tail siding. From logs smaller than 13

inches in diameter the Banning’s produce, as a minimum, four separate products including a one inch thick natural edge piece of lumber, a 1 ½ inch piece of natural edge siding, and two dovetail siding pieces. Generally a three inch piece can also be taken out of the middle of the log to be used either for siding or for a 3x10 timber. From bigger logs, the thin kerf band saw yields four high-value dovetail siding pieces in addition to numerous other boards.

Chris anticipates that increases in production will mean a number of changes for Keeper Enterprises. Larry is semi-retired so employees will be needed in the future. Chris also wants to upgrade his operation to include a high performance Wood-Mizer LT70. “We’ve been happy with Wood-Mizer service and saws so the LT70 is the logical choice as we look to increase production,” he offers.

The company is also in the process of constructing a building for lumber storage and installing a solar powered kiln that will be used to both heat storage buildings and dry lumber.

Keeper Enterprises is producing quality natural wood products that appeals to those desiring a genuine rustic natural log home look while retaining all the environmental benefits modern home building offers. By processing beetle kill logs and utilizing thin kerf band saw technology to produce siding for conventionally constructed homes the company offers customers the opportunity to enjoy the best of both worlds while making positive environmental contributions. **W**

Keeper’s sawmill bed has been extended to 40’ to allow milling at the lengths demanded by the log home industry. The LT40’s thin kerf allows Keeper to economically mill high end lumber from material conventional mills generally reject including misshapen and/or dead stems. The result is more recovery from the resource and greatly enhanced environmental sensitivity.

