

# RAGGED MOUNTAIN WOODWORKS

By Alan Burton  
For the *Beacon*

It is not that odd to find creativity lurking in the hills of southern New Hampshire. Indeed, it might be considered a perfect sanctuary, really, for entrepreneurs, given the landscape and a sense of space that most cities and suburbs cannot provide.

Such is the case with Tripp Stiles and his family, who moved to West Andover six years ago. Having a son, six years old, and twin daughters who are two, Tripp finds himself involved in the local school system. He coaches Kearsarge Youth Hockey, working with a team of five- to eight-year-olds, including his son.

Tripp has been married for 25 years to Sabine, who currently works for his father's consultant business, seeking



Tripp Stiles Photo: Bob Bussey

executives for in-state manufacturing plants.

Tripp attended Kearsarge High School while living in New London. Studying graphic design in college, he eventually started his own business: Ragged Mountain Woodworks, which has grown into a successful high-end cabinet-making company operated from his home in Andover. He has been in business for 10 years.

"I had a small painting company when I was in high school, and even college. It was sort of how I supported myself. And after college, it turned into more of a construction thing, and then it moved into more of the finish end of things. Also, my father is a big wooden boat lover, and we've always had wooden sailboats. So, every winter, I was in there helping with the 'bright' work. I don't know, but I think that's maybe where it came from." Tripp explains. The business started mostly as a custom furniture shop, modeled after the Shaker Early American furniture style.

"Actually, I was working for a shop up in Lebanon. My parents lived in East Andover, and there was a big barn, and I set up my shop in there. I was just doing it on the side, but I landed this job to build

a kitchen for some people in Newbury." He soon left the job in Lebanon, and things have steamrolled from there.

At this point, the majority of his business is by word of mouth, although he still advertises in local newspapers from time to time. Ragged Mountain Woodworks does exclusively residential work, and the contractors pretty much know who and where they are.

"We do kitchens, built-ins, vanities, libraries, and we still build furniture. When I started the company, I was building a lot more furniture, but we don't do it as much. It is hard to find and train people to build that quality, so it was really just me. I found out quickly that to make a living in this business I was going to have to build cabinets," says Tripp.

"We do our design work on a computer, using a cabinet program, which allows the customer to see the project in 3-D, like a virtual tour, and you can see each cabinet individually as well, and the detail of that cabinet. I'd say that about 90% of the time we work directly with homeowners," he states.

In conjunction with the digital design technology, the addition of a CNC router, which links directly to the computer, has been an enormous benefit.

"Once I have the design finalized on the computer, I push a button, and it figures out all of the parts that need to be cut out of the plywood, and actually saves material," Tripp says.

Ragged Mountain Woodworks limits the amount of stock wood that it keeps on hand, preferring to purchase mostly on a job-by-job basis. While most of their business is local, there have been some out of state projects, especially in the Cape Cod area.

"One of the reasons I got into making cabinets is that it would be a tangible thing that could become self-sufficient at some point, and it's easier to price than furniture," says Tripp.

"The biggest challenge is running the business, all the different hats, and my time between everything trying to keep things moving. We actually had a consultant here last week to help with our mind set in trying to maximize production. It was very interesting to actually go through it all with someone else, because you just do it all every day, and you don't think about the stuff you're actually doing.

"The biggest reward is seeing a completed project with a happy customer. It's nice to get positive feedback after a project is done, that it came out the way they thought, or even better," Tripp concluded.

Ragged Mountain Woodworks can be reached at 735-6100 or on the Web at [RaggedMtWoodworks.com](http://RaggedMtWoodworks.com).

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