

Making their mark



MARK WHEATLEY AND GERRY HENSELS

WHEN IT COMES TO LASER ETCHING, Gerry Hensels and Mark Wheatley say the possibilities are almost endless. Since establishing Lazer-Tech Etching and Cutting Inc. in January, the partners have worked with a wide range of materials, from granite and golf bags to microfleece and flooring.

Hensels, owner of custom millwork and kitchen cabinetry firm Wood Works International, first saw a demonstration of computerized laser etching at a kitchen and bath trade show in Florida. "At the time (four years ago) it was cutting-edge technology and I thought it would add a unique touch to kitchen cabinets," he says. "I kept my eye on it and watched it evolve."

After discussing the technology with Wheatley, who had worked as a subcontractor with Wood Works International, the pair researched the local etching market and moved forward with the new venture as a partnership.

Etching isn't a new concept, so to ensure they could offer something unique to the market Hensels and Wheatley decided on a machine that could accommodate large objects. With an investment of \$100,000, they purchased the necessary computer hardware and software and a laser machine with a four- by eight-foot bed—large enough to handle shower doors or other similarly sized items—and a second lens that gives them the capability of etching rounded surfaces like wine bottles and glassware. They also didn't skimp on quality, opting for a machine that uses flying optic technology to provide high accuracy, power and speed.

As well as etching, the machinery can be set up for cutting. Sign makers, for example, often require acrylic lettering to be used in raised or backlit signage. Lazer-Tech's equipment can cut large letters—up to four by eight feet and one-half inch thick. Sign makers are a prime market, says Wheatley, adding that other target markets include homebuilders and promotional advertising firms. While the company will do individual retail orders, the long-term goal is to be a business-to-business service provider.



To that end, Hensels spent the first few weeks pounding the pavement, and both he and Wheatley spread the word to their business acquaintances. They also participated in regional home trade shows. Their promotional activities and word-of-mouth referrals generated more than \$12,000 in sales for Lazer-Tech in the first six weeks of operation.

Lazer-Tech is housed inside Wood Works International's 1,200-square-foot unit on Wonderland Road South. Laser etched products are displayed in the



showroom alongside kitchen counter and cabinet samples, and the laser work is done in workspace near the front of the building. Hensels and Wheatley hope to grow the business over time and gradually phase out of woodworking altogether. ■ *Kym Wolfe*

LAZER-TECH ETCHING AND CUTTING INC.

BUSINESS Laser etching and cutting
ESTABLISHED 2007
EMPLOYEES 2
MARKETS London and region
519-652-3006