

2021

Springtime Home & Garden

Bolan's Barrels of Fun Launches in Boistfort Valley

Local Woodworker Leaves Industry to Kick Start Small Business

By Claudia Yaw

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For about a decade, Ron Bolan worked for high-end cabinetry companies in the area. He says he learned to be handy from his stepdad, who would regularly use his skills to transform the cheap rentals Bolan lived in growing up.

And while Bolan is clearly skilled in his craft, he says working for big companies felt like getting taken advantage of. He recalls seeing bosses make big bucks for work he couldn't feel proud of, or seeing those same bosses fire his friends when they struggled to find childcare.

All of it led to his departure from the industry. He put in his two weeks' notice this month.

please see **BARRELS**, page C2

Rod Rector holds up a Rector Planter branding iron while sitting at a Bolan's "Hangout" Barrel in the Boistfort Valley Tuesday evening.



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Flames rise as shish kabobs sit on a Bolan "Grub Hub" Barrel at Ron Bolan's house in the Boistfort Valley Tuesday evening





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Ron Bolan talks about the Bolan Barrel at his home in the Boistfort Valley on Tuesday.

Barrels

Continued from page C1

Now, he hopes his new business — Bolan's Barrels of Fun — will be an outlet for his passion. Down the road, he hopes to employ others looking to leave the industry like he did.

"I want people to come, be happy, enjoy what they do and go home happy instead of bummed," he told The Chronicle. "I want people to not get taken advantage of."

Bolan had his "grand reveal" this Tuesday, showcasing his handmade wine barrel fire pit tables to the public. The pieces — which come in three sizes, the "hang out," the "Bolan barrel" and the "grub hub," — are made from reclaimed wine barrels and industrial spoils.

The Boistfort Valley resident finished his first one as a birthday gift to his wife last month. The tables are rustic yet glossy, with pieces of recycled glass that glimmer in the fire, fueled by a hidden propane tank. It was a departure in some ways from the chop blocks, spatulas and lazy Susans he's been pumping out throughout the pandemic. And the community took notice, with several people on Facebook asking how they could acquire their own.

please see **BARRELS**, *page C3*



A dog bed made from a barrel is displayed at Ron Bolan's house in the Boistfort Valley as a canine receives pets Tuesday evening.



Bolan's Barrels of Fun works to reduce, reuse, and recycle in their craft.



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For 20 Years, Gardening Has Been Labor of Love at Blueberry Hill Nursery

By Eric Rosane
ericr@chronline.com

Thelma Hauge has a 30-second commute. And it's a beautiful one.

Traveling from the doorstep of her fifth-wheel to her greenhouse may only take a hop and a skip, but it's a view the 79-year-old Vader resident can't get over — especially on warm, cloudless days.

"Every single day, when I come to work, I get to the rose arbor, stand and look at the nursery and say 'I am so darn lucky to do this,'" Hauge said on a recent spring afternoon. "I have worked

for myself for so many years now that — you know the old saying: 'I love my job, I love my boss. I'm self-employed.'"

The job? Gardening. And a whole lot more when you're your own boss.

Hauge and husband, John Glasser, 77, operate the Blueberry Hill Nursery and Art Gallery, nestled in the hills between Ryderwood and Vader. The business has been a seasonal mainstay in teaching and educating budding amateur gardeners and horticulturalists since 20 years ago when Hauge opened the nursery.

please see NURSERY, page C4



Thelma Hauge transfers snapdragons inside a greenhouse at the Blueberry Hill Nursery Tuesday afternoon in Vader.

Barrels

Continued from page C2

"You just became a millionaire," one user commented.

That was just a few weeks ago, but Bolan and his family are dead set on keeping the ball rolling. The 50 wine barrels Bolan now has on hand are expected to last him a few months, and he's already planning to build a new workshop at his 16-acre property to streamline the process.

Family members joke that this year's birthday gift to his wife didn't upstage what he made last year — a massive bed frame made from plumber pipe, mason jars and 30 varieties of wood, all reclaimed from pallets.

But this year's gift of the fire pit table will hopefully be the gift that keeps on giving, in the form of a successful business.

With everything Bolan makes, his philosophy is to reduce, reuse and recycle. Hence the pallet bed frame. He remembers working at cabinetry companies and throwing away significant amounts of wood at the end of the day.

"These are literally just getting smashed and getting thrown in landfills," he said of the industrial-sized spools in his backyard. "A lot of different stuff gets thrown away, and I don't like it."

He now pays a local electrician to save the spools, which are used to wrap up things like fiber optic cables, but now serve as finished table tops.

The sustainable model has other perks, too. While the material to build one fire pit table can run hundreds of dollars, most of Bolan's scraps are saved to use for other projects. The tops of the barrels, for example, are turned into dog beds, which Bolan can customize with pets' names.

Even the branding iron used on some of Bolan's pieces is reused in some sense. The "R" brand was first used by relatives in the 1800s to brand cows in the Big Hannaford area. Bolan's father-in-law, Rod "Hot Rod" Rector, who used it on cows decades ago, had the idea to revive the branding iron for Bolan's woodwork.

Bolan says the next step in his business is to learn how to make things like chairs — adjustable adirondack chairs with wine glass holders — and to start collaborating with other local artisans, like leather workers. He's also looking to incorporate some art from his family members, who belong to the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians.

"Everything about it feels good," Bolan said. "Everybody's been receptive in a really good way."

Learn more by searching @BolanBarrelasofFun on Facebook. Bolan can be reached at 360-515-1441.



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John Glasser and Thelma Hauge pose for a photo inside a greenhouse at the Blueberry Hill Nursery Tuesday afternoon in Vader.

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Nursery

Continued from page C3

The couple went on a temporary hiatus a number of years ago, but are back this year with their third-annual sale.

The rural nursery, located at 165 Hendricksen Road, will open its doors to customers Saturday, May 1, selling reasonably-priced vegetable starts such as cauliflower, cabbage, broccoli and carrots as well as a full assortment of perennials, flowers, herbs and deer-resistant plants.

It will be open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesdays through Sundays, though hours may vary.

To Hauge and Glasser, seeding and tending to a full nursery serves as a labor of love. The sale only lasts two months out of the year, though the couple spends more than six months prepping and organizing the effort.

The Chronicle stopped by on a warm April afternoon. Ju-

venile starts and small flowers were just beginning to pop up and the designated sections in the greenhouse were starting to take shape. The couple meandered about, making sure plants were watered every couple hours, planting new seeds and making signs for every pot.

The couple, who met 12 years ago, have been gardening just about their entire lives, and even though they're master gardeners, each new sunrise brings with it opportunity to learn something new about home gardening, which has exploded in popularity over the last year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"You have to do it because you love to do it. You can't do it like it's a chore," said Hauge from inside her detached arts studio, where she also teaches painting and watercoloring. "And the other thing that is important is that, if you are a new gardener, there's no stupid questions.

please see **NURSERY**, page C5



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A mannequin stands next to signage for the Blueberry Hill Nursery in Vader on Tuesday.

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Nursery

Continued from page C4

Buy your plants from someone who can give you good advice, ‘cause the advice is free.” Gardening — whether done with friends, family or alone — is a social activity, Hauge said, that only gets more exciting and fruitful the more you learn. Hauge originally moved to her little plot off state Route 506 in 1992 after a 15-year career in law enforcement. Her claim to fame was she was the first female officer for the Mason County Sheriff’s Office, she said, and served as an investigator for the state Gambling Commission.

When Hauge moved to Ryder, her plot was mostly pasture. So she started planting oak trees and other shrubbery. It wouldn’t take too long for the two to meet. “I was teaching ballroom dancing in Ryderwood where I live, and she came as somebody interested in learning,” Glasser said. The two still dance to this day, though the pandemic has squashed any opportunity to go to organized events. Dolly, one of two mannequins posed in Hauge’s art studio, wears one of her red, sequined ballroom-dancer’s dresses. With the onset of the pandemic last year, Blueberry Hill shifted to an online-store approach. The outpouring of business, with everyone social distancing at home, surprised the couple. “We set up order online so that people didn’t even have to get out of their car, they just ordered online and we could have it ready to go,” Hauge said. “A lot of people, however, chose to come and pick their stuff up out of the greenhouse and we



Jared Wenzelburger / jared@chronline.com

Thelma Hauge shows off her own and student artwork displayed in a building on the same property as the Blueberry Hill Nursery Tuesday afternoon in Vader.



Plants grow from seeds in trays at the Blueberry Hill Nursery in Vader Tuesday afternoon.

had a huge number of people who were first-time gardeners because they were really feeling the pinch.” The couple estimates this year should be about the same since people still have that “pandemic mindset,” Glasser said gardening has proven to be a quality family activity during the pandemic. Having their business stay steady during the pandemic has been a reassurance for the retired couple. Last December,

a house fire tore through their two-bedroom, one-bathroom ranch. The two currently live in a fifth-wheel with hopes of completing a full renovation of the house this summer. The nursery will offer about 6,000 plants this year. They expect some high-demand plants to sell out in days, with some plants going on sale in June. Online ordering will be available this year, and the nursery will accept debit and credit cards in-person. The nursery doesn’t have a Facebook page, but online purchasing information will be posted by the couple on Facebook forums at a later date. The farm can be reached by phone at 360-295-3488 and 360-749-0634.

“You have to do it because you love to do it. You can’t do it like it’s a chore. And the other thing that is important is that, if you are a new gardener, there’s no stupid questions.”

Thelma Hauge
Blueberry Hill Nursery

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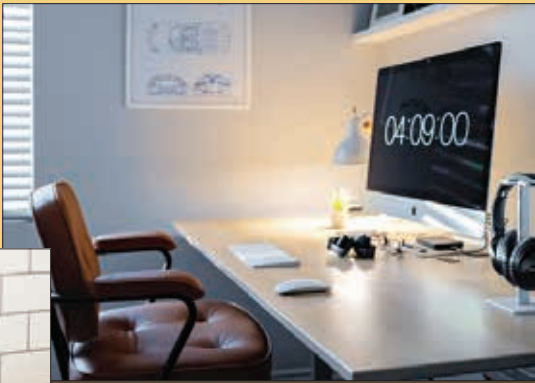
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