



UNUSUAL SERVICE

Craftsman's custom puzzles are precisely cut to perfection

by Mike Walker

On Christmas Eve seven years ago, Rick Butler and his girlfriend, Kim Holton, sat around a coffee table exchanging presents by the fireplace.

Butler saved a surprise — a wooden jigsaw puzzle with more than 100 pieces — until last.

When Holton began to look for the last piece, Butler fished into his pocket, placed the missing piece, knelt down and watched her read the entire puzzle. “It read, ‘You are my angel, will you marry me?’” Butler says. Kim, of course, said yes, and Butler continues to buy her a new puzzle every Christmas.

“We have two boys now, and he’s been having their pictures turned into puzzles,” Kim says. “I love it. It’s something I look forward to every year.”

Butler bought his proposal puzzle from Mark Cappitella, owner of MGC’s Custom Made

Wooden Jigsaw Puzzles, who discovered a global niche when he lost his job as a purchasing agent for an industrial motion and filtration distributor due to downsizing in 1995. “I had been building a birdhouse, and I started cutting a scrap piece of plywood, which I spun and turned as I went,”

Cappitella says. “The pieces resembled a puzzle and that was the beginning of my career.”

Cappitella’s birdhouse scraps turned into a time-consuming hobby and finally a business in 1997, requiring involvement from his wife, Allison Cappitella, and two of his five children; 11-year-old Melissa and

6-year-old Christopher, who are learning the trade with their own cutting tools. The family creates 500 to 600 wood puzzles each year from photographs, artwork and posters; more than 5,700 puzzles, 3,544 numbered, have



PHOTO BY TOM KUTZ *Mark Cappitella's custom puzzles range in price from \$50 to more than \$10,000.*





made their way under Christmas trees and into marriage proposals and even corporate-training exercises. Since they're personalized, Cappitella says virtually anyone can enjoy the puzzles, which have sold in 35 countries for as little as \$50 up to \$10,600, depending on the cuts and size.

Even with reportedly flawless craftsmanship, Ian Ransley, a MGC customer and Chevron graphic designer, especially likes the company's friendly, family approach. Ransley called Cappitella to transform Chevron's corporate photo collage into a 4-foot by 6-foot puzzle. "They gave each manager a piece for the team-building exercise," Ransley says. Chevron's puzzle cost about \$800 and is displayed in their Houston office.

Chevron's puzzle is a fraction of the cost compared to Cappitella's most expensive creation from Finland birch, his preferred wood. For \$10,600 each, Cappitella made two 4,000-piece puzzles for museums displays in London and



PHOTO BY TOM KUTZ "I make your puzzle how you tell me to make it," Cappitella says.

New York City.

With only a handful of competitors, Cappitella says his success derives from the puzzles' uniqueness. "I make your puzzle how you tell me to make it," he says. "If your father likes to golf, owns an Audi TT and has two

German Shepherds, I can carve pieces of the puzzle to look like these things."

Uniqueness was exactly what Abigail Sheehan needed for her wedding day June 9. She purchased a wedding guest book puzzle from Cappitella, and requested at her reception that each guest sign the underside of a different piece. "It was one more thing that just made it a really special day," she says.

**MGC's Custom
Made Wooden
Jigsaw Puzzles**

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