

**Mentorships and Internships to Help Train the Next Generation**

Stark Mountain Woodworking is found in New Haven and services both custom and

commercial woodworking needs. Louis Dupont is a co-founder along with Skimmer Hellier. Louis shared that Stark Mountain began in 1993, with DuPont and Hellier, who worked

for fellow VWWC member Birdseye Building Company, buying the woodworking shop at

the Bates Barn in Richmond from Birdseye. After four years they came to need more space for their business, so they relocated New Haven where they bought half of an old chicken barn that Onion River Pottery was using for their commemorative mug making business. In 2000 Louis and Skimmer bought the other half of the property and have continued to grow their shop and business in this location since. Stark Mountain does all types of residential custom work

vanities, front entrances, libraries and elaborate trellises to name a few, with a focus on kitchen cabinetry. They have also expanded into commercial work having serviced schools, colleges, churches, libraries, and recently the Burlington YMCA. The company does not market much as their projects and relationships formed through their work generates the vast number of jobs for them. They do have radio ads on Vermont Public Radio. Louis said the business has “grown beyond expectations.”

Louis described Stark Mountain’s time in the Coronavirus pandemic as “interesting.” Like others, Stark Mountain was shut down for six weeks and after reopening had a slow build back. Louis said the company was helped by a PPP loan which helped cover most of the payroll during the shutdown, enabling employees to stay paid. Work is strong now for Stark Mountain particularly in the residential category of work as many people are improving their homes since more time is being spent in the home. There have not been changes in either the type of customer that Stark Mountain typically services nor the kinds of products they are seeking.

The pandemic has not caused any supply chain issues for the business. They did a good deal of buying of materials in March in preparation for when operations resumed. They had a good supply of wood and other materials for their projects when their business reopened. Not many infrastructure needs have arisen from the pandemic either. They did, however, set up portable toilets at either end of the facility to limit sharing the same restrooms. Stark Mountain has enough space in their facility for workers to properly social distance as they work. They are also implementing State issued guidelines like mask wearing and temperature checks. They have had a few scares but thankfully no cases.

The pandemic has been hard on the company’s 23 employees though. The shutdown produced challenges for all employees, and the return to work has brought about new HR issues. For employees with kids, it has been hard for them to find childcare. For some families, kids having to stay home doing school remotely has definitely added difficulty to their schedules and home life. Louis gave the example of one employee who is having to take a leave of absence in order to care for his child with special needs. When an employee has a COVID scare it affects the workload of others. The exposed individual’s quarantine causes other workers to “cover the gaps” and handle the tasks that the quarantined individual would normally perform. The company’s bookkeeper has recently taken over HR and is handling funds for these new needs in the company. Louis and the employees also especially miss the social aspect of their job as they cannot gather during coffee breaks or lunch breaks.

One thing Louis and Stark Mountain have learned through the pandemic is being more careful about work environments. This is particularly true in their work outside the shop. Extra caution is taken when doing installations, for instance, since they are working in another person’s home or business. They want to be respectful and keep their clients safe.

When speaking of the strengths of Stark Mountain, Louis first mentioned production capacity. Between their machinery (which includes 3 axis and 5 axis CNC machines) and crew they have the ability to create a wide variety of products, and be competitive on large commercial projects as well. Another strength is their design and pre-engineering ability. Doing a great deal of custom work, Stark Mountain has developed a solid team of CAD designers, CNC operators and talented craftsmen that can turn rudimentary plans into fully detailed shop drawings. This is especially true when it comes to their residential work like cabinetry and doors. Louis also mentioned their commitment to youth as a unique aspect of the business. Stark Mountain is always welcome to administering mentorships and internships to students who are interested in woodworking in order to help train the next generation of woodworkers. They have had a good experience with many in the past and look forward to more in the future. Louis and the team at Stark Mountain are eager to share their skills and knowledge with oncoming staff. “We are very bullish on the basic idea of adding value to this amazing, locally grown resource, wood, and creating beautiful and durable cabinets and millwork to enhance our customers lives.”

While Louis personally has not been highly involved in the VWWC through the years, he sees it as a very valuable organization for Stark Mountain Woodworking to be a part of. He feels being a member is a great way to meet other woodworkers and share ideas. He also enjoys the clout that the group brings to Vermont woodworkers. He said the VWWC helps with training of woodworkers and they help make VT woodworkers’ voices heard on matters that pertain to them. Louis said that Stark Mountain is open to hosting a VWWC meeting in future.