

get to know Specialty Iron Works



Steve Benjamin got his start in metalwork at an early age. Growing up on a farm east of Shelby, as a young child he worked on winter-time projects with his father. At nine or 10, with a little fatherly guidance, he cut the pieces for a little trailer and welded them together.

Thirty-five years later, Benjamin, the owner of Specialty Iron Works in Great Falls, is still pursuing his passion for metalwork and welding.

Specialty Iron Works has a "hitch shop" that produces trailers, hitches, towbars "and almost anything to do with towing." The welding shop does custom residential and commercial work, often involving railings and stairways. "That's our bread and butter but we do a little bit of everything."

Most of the work comes on the residential side, fabricating interior and exterior railing and other ornamentation. The demand for metal work, tied to home construction and remodeling, surges in the spring and fall. "We work all year, installing railing inside and outside," Benjamin says. "Weather affects us but doesn't stop us."

While hesitant to pick a most-memorable job, the lifelong metalworker mentions a big spiral staircase in an area home and another involving fabricating a large S-curved railing for another home. And there was the big project as St. Ann's Cathedral almost two decades ago. It involved fabricating and installing exterior and interior railing, including some topped with shiny metal pieces. "I had to figure out how to attach all those pieces, Benjamin says. "It was kind of a neat job."

Benjamin moved to Great Falls as a young man and found work in a welding shop. He also took on jobs on his own in the evenings and on weekends. The purchase of a computerized cutting tool in the late 1980s that allowed him to cut almost any shape out of a plate of steel was a big leap. There were only a couple of the machines in the state at the time. "It was pretty new and neat stuff," Benjamin says.

It wasn't long before Benjamin bought a building and started Specialty Iron Works at 5 57th Street S. in Great Falls. The building saw several expansions and is now at about 5,000 square-feet in size.

"The first few years were kind of nip and tuck," with Benjamin not able to hire any full-time employees for five or six years. Now the business has eight full-timers, many with years of experience. That experience, coupled with pride of workmanship, helps the business stand out in an increasingly competitive field.

With a big chunk of residential work, "we are really not competing with the big guys," Benjamin says, noting that commercial jobs can involve less creativity. "We just enjoy doing more of the special stuff."



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