

Fence seems good place for perch

Stockades provide favorite material for carvings of fish

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REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

WATERTOWN — Six years ago, Sharon Sharpe looked at a beaten-up stockade fence and saw a fish.

Her life hasn't been the same since.

The 67-year-old Watertown resident and her husband Patrick now spend hours every week sawing, sanding, and painting fish out of decrepit stockade fences to sell across the country.

"I just love fish," said Sharon. "I've always loved fish, ever since I was little. This just feels kind of natural."

After sawing thousands of fish from old fence pickets, the Sharpes have developed an eye for the perfect stockade fence. There aren't many rules. It simply has to be weathered with each picket



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Sharon and Patrick Sharpe of Watertown stand with some of their handmade fish, which hang in rooms in their home.

more than three inches wide.

If the Sharpes find the perfect fence on somebody else's property, Patrick goes up and knocks on the front door. He usually volunteers to pay the owner for the fence and take it down.

He said he gets a puzzled

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TO BUY FISH

Expressions, a home decorating catalog, sells the fish at www.expression-scatalog.com/. Inquiries should be directed to fencefish@gmail.com

FISH: Some brightly painted, some in pastels

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look and a suspicious, "Why?"

"I guess most people don't have people coming up asking to tear down their fence and pay them for it," he said. "Well, I just tell them my wife makes fish out of stockade fences."

The Sharpes chose stockade fences because of the natural curve arching like the hump of a fish's back.

Settled along North Street, the Sharpes have wooden fish everywhere.

Products waiting to be finished pack buckets like sardines in the mud room. A brightly painted fish hangs above the stove.

In the back yard, there is a bench where Sharon paints and a small shed, stuffed to the gills with fence pickets, where most of the sawing takes place. The Sharpes make between 200 and 300 fish every week.

What started as a hobby became a small business venture last year.

Suzanne Nicoll, a home decor agent from Redding, said she and her husband were walking around the Elephant's Trunk Country Flea Market in New Milford when she saw the Sharpes' sons selling the fish.

"We thought they were charming," Nicoll said.



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Sharon Sharpe signs her craft fish, which hang from a simple wire attached to nails.

Nicoll said the fish have been a success and have sold by the thousands across the country. The biggest seller is as far away as Hawaii. She said the fish typically go for at least \$32 a pop once they hit publications such as Expressions, a home decorating catalog.

"I think it's part of the whole recycling boom and eco-boom where people want to reuse things," she said. "People always ask us if they

are really made from old wooden fences. And we say yes, they really are."

Sharon said the fish she sells to dealers come painted in specific patterns, but she loves making her own designs, too. Some fish are painted in bright, bold colors, while others are done in pastels.

Some have little red hearts painted on the fins; others have blue and yellow zigzagging lines.

The Sharpes are sawing, sanding and painting their way into fall, trying to get most of their work done. When snow comes, the boards take days to dry out.

Standing over her jars of paint in the kitchen, Sharon laughs about last winter when Patrick was outside in his boots and coat, sanding boards in the snow.

"Yes," Patrick said. "We're definitely trying to get most of it done by winter."