

Rowe brings Nantucket carving charm to coastal town

BY JOSHUA FISHER
Times Editor

Billy Rowe recently set up his woodworking shop and showroom in town. But his work is not new to the area.

The Cape Cod Bay native has been carving since he was 12 years old. After opening Nantucket Woodcarving on Nantucket Island at 25 in 1992, he's hoping to replicate his middle-New England success in southern-New England.

So many of his Nantucket customers were Fairfield County residents who summered on the island, that Rowe knew Darien would be a good place to relocate.

After taking some time off from the trade when he got married, Rowe and his wife, Ashleigh, and 3-year-old daughter, Sophia, moved to South Norwalk last year but plan to move to Darien in the fall. He said this is where they want to raise his family.

Just recently, Rowe has started showing off his work at Chuck and Tania Thomas's Herrcutters vintage barbershop, atop the old red schoolhouse at 21 Tokeneke Road. Rowe's work fits right in with the eclectic, historic building that is also home to Schoolhouse Nutrition and the Paws & Reflect dog grooming salon.

Rowe moved to Nantucket in the 1980s, during a building boom. He quickly filled a need in the New England island village. He created an award-winning team that designed, carved and installed thousands of custom pieces including quarter boards, commercial signs, mantels, cornices, whaling scenes



Woodcarver Billy Rowe likes to show off his craft to a crowd. He carves a whale in Rowayton as children look on. (Talkingboxdmg.com photos)

and Renaissance-inspired decorative carvings.

Rowe's quarter board work can be seen throughout the island. And this work is among his most ordered. The wooden signs display home names, family names and business names throughout the island. And there are already Rowe quarter boards hanging in Darien. He hopes that Darien and Rowayton businesses will begin using his art work for their signs.

"The nice thing about wood signs is when they get old, they have character — unlike plastic signs, which just look worn," Rowe said during a recent interview at the schoolhouse showroom.

Rowe grew up in Scituate, Mass., where his father was a craftsman and puppeteer. He learned to carve alongside his father and eventually started working for a local woodworker.

"I started doing any woodworking I could learn," Rowe said. "I did that until I turned 25. I then opened up my own shop."

Like he did in Nantucket, Rowe plans to have a full-fledged workshop in Darien that would also offer woodcarving classes for adults and children. "You would walk in and see people working," he said. "This is a very nautical place. So my work fits right in."

Rowe says his favorite work is nautical carvings, ornamental ship carvings, whales and eagles. He has been seen carving recently at downtown Darien's Thursday concerts at Grove Plaza. And he'll be carving at the Rowayton farmer's market on Friday.

He has also teamed up with Darienite Bryce Davies, a fellow woodworker.

Those interested in checking out or ordering his work can e-mail or call Rowe to set up a time; or visit the schoolhouse. The quarter boards take four to six weeks to complete. And Rowe will go over all the details with you from the carving to the paint colors. "I don't hold back," he said.

Of course, Rowe gets some interesting names for quarter boards. One that he recalls from his days in Nantucket was ordered by an Ohioan for his long-dreamed-of Nantucket vacation home:

"YOUARENOWHERE."

To contact Nantucket Woodcarving, call Rowe at 515-1257 or visit NantucketWoodcarving.com.

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Rowe's favorite work includes carvings of whales, above, eagles, nautical and ornamental ship carvings.