

'Stuffing it' comes naturally to WPCCC taxidermy teacher

By PAIGE RICHARDSON
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Research, determination, and trial and error is how Chris Stockton became a taxidermist.

"I learned most of it on my own and by doing it for friends," said Stockton, who will be teaching taxidermy at Western Piedmont Community College this fall.

His determination came about 12 years ago when Stockton went to have a deer mounted and asked the taxidermist if he could watch the process.

The taxidermist refused to let Stockton watch, and told him not to learn the process.

"After that, I became determined to learn," said Stockton.

The road to becoming a taxidermist was not always easy for Stockton.

"I messed up a lot of things, but they were mine," he said.

Now, he doesn't have to worry about messing up a

lot of things, because over the past nine years, he's gotten much better.

"Everything is top notch," he said.

By doing everything "top notch", Stockton's business has grown from serving friends to people from Pennsylvania to Florida.

By serving people from all over the east coast, he could turn his passion into full-time work, and for Stockton taxidermy truly is a passion.

"The only thing I love more than taxidermy is my wife and son," he said.

Stockton, who recently moved to Morganton, has his taxidermy shop in Little Switzerland. He hopes to extend his business to Morganton soon.

Since opening his taxidermy shop nine years ago, Stockton has developed a speciality. "My speciality is deer," he said. "Some people can do some things better than others and I can do deer."

Although deer is his speciality, he also stuffs a lot of

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fish and can do any other animal.

"There's so much you can do with taxidermy," said Stockton.

He likes to use the art form to be creative, however, most people already know how their prize game should look when the process is completed.

"I have to be creative with my own stuff," he said.

Although Stockton has an opportunity to be creative with taxidermy, the preservation process is the same every time.

The first step is to remove the skin from the animal. The skin is then tanned and dried. Once the skin has been treated, a mold is made.

The molds are often made of wood or wires. Stockton, for example craves his own wooden molds. The skin is then sewed on the mold and the animal is painted to restore

natural colors.

Many animals are painted with several different colors to get the desired look. A trout for example has 17 colors, said Stockton.

The animal can then be mounted. "The process of mounting, a kid could do," said Stockton. "It's just getting to that stage."

Stockton knows a kid could do the mounting, and his son, Christopher, Jr. is a good example.

"He helps me a lot," said Stockton. "I believe by the time he's 10, he'll be better than me."

Stockton lives in Morganton with his new wife, Susan, and his son.

Stockton will teach a taxidermy class at Western Piedmont Community College beginning Sept. 12.

The 32-hour class is open to both men and women. However Stockton adds, women usually do better in the class than men.

"Women make better taxidermists," he said. "They are more particular and take more pride in their work."

"Men are not as particular about details," he said. "If something is a little off, then that's all right with a man, but not with a woman."

However, all taxidermy students must first get past the blood and guts of the work.

During the class at Western Piedmont, students will have three weeks of classroom work then take a month's break to get their game for the hands-on part of the class.

The cost for the class is \$250, considerably less than the \$4,000 most taxidermy classes cost, said Stockton.

The cost for the class covers tuition and supplies.

For more information about Stockton's work or the class, call 433-0041.