

DMRAY Sawmill Inc.

By Meg Bull

What started out as a semi-permanent financial plan for Don Ray has become a successful business, even in the face of tough economic challenges and market instability over the last few years. In the mid '90s, Don and his wife were faced with the common parental question of determining how to finance their two daughters' college educations. The original plan was to work on weekends to make extra money, but in 1998 DMRAY Sawmill Inc. was established.

The company grew quickly. "In 2000 we were able to incorporate, [and] hire three employees. [In] 2004 my wife and I both had resigned our outside employment and hired three more employees. We were able to run and operate our own business and today we now employ 10 people." With their lead sawyer, Jeff Smith, at the wheel, utilizing the LT300 (now the WM3000), DMRAY is able to average 5,000 feet of board a day. "We specialize 90-95% in green walnut grade lumber. The other 5-10% is mostly Ash, Cherry and Red Oak right now. We utilize the whole log in all species we saw. We sell the bark, sawdust, chips, cants and lumber." The LT300 is the "main square up and grade saw. It sets the pace overall for our mill and daily productions."

The Rays were even able to utilize the mill in 2001 to "saw and construct our log home. Since then we have sawed out logs for three other log homes with it and wood siding, and cedar decks." Rounding out their Wood-Mizer arsenal, DMRAY also utilizes an incline conveyor, transfer deck, and edger, and in the future would like to upgrade to an industrial WM3500 headrig.

Though it has been a goal made real to create this business, the hardships of the recent economic challenges have still been felt. "It's really been hard since the domestic mortgage meltdown for all sawmills. Especially those sawing certain species that were being used in abundance during the building boom. Everything came to a screeching halt for poplar and red oak - two of the most popular domestic species. For us, 2008-2009 were our worst years, 2010 was good and 2011 fair... It's been very difficult to withstand all our market has had to adjust to in the housing market. Overall most businesses I talk to want to think positive."

Being able to service "customers who mostly export our lumber" has kept DMRAY Sawmill Inc. on its feet. Despite the ups and more recent downs, one feeling is certain. "It's been great - a dream come true for us to own and operate our own business."