

A Better Retirement Plan
By Danny Hamsley

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After purchasing the LT15 sawmill in 2002 for personal projects, I started selling a little lumber that I had in excess of what I needed, and was surprised at the interest that I got from local woodworkers. I developed a plan to retire at age 57 and focus on sawing and selling hardwood lumber and working as a Forestry Consultant since I am a Registered Forester.

I was able to retire in April 2011. I am also now able to spend more time turning that high quality lumber produced on the sawmill into high quality, custom furniture. My business, though small, is all about timber, lumber, and furniture. If I tried to go and buy the lumber, the profit would not be there at my scale to justify it. The sawmill makes the whole strategy work, and it is the keystone of the whole process.

I saw to maintain an inventory of the various hardwood species that local woodworkers are after. When I am not sawing, I may be working on the lumber, stacking, air drying, sorting, etc. People call and come buy lumber just about anytime 7 days a week. I also spend a lot of time on the furniture side of things. I always have some type of furniture project on the drawing board or in progress. There is also time required to measure and mark timber, harvest timber, skid out the logs and prepare them for sawing. I spend as much time harvesting, skidding, and preparing the logs as I do sawing them. I may be small, but I am fully integrated!

I saw primarily hardwood, the majority off of my timberland. My strategy is to saw, air dry, and sell rough cut hardwood lumber for local woodworkers. I am supplying a exclusive service because you cannot find hardwood lumber like walnut, oak, cherry, yellow poplar, and maple in this area. I cut all thicknesses from 4/4 up to 16/4. Lengths are 8 feet and 10 feet. To date, my primary focus has been building furniture for family and friends, but the sawmill will allow me to increase the amount of custom furniture that I can build and sell. This will be a growth area for me.

The sawmill allows me to gain significantly more value from my timberland than if I just offered the timber for sale to a logger or commercial sawmill. For example, I can sell a large white oak on the stump as timber to a logger or mill, and it will be worth about \$60 on the stump. I can harvest the tree myself, saw it on the LT15, air dry the lumber, and sell the lumber from that tree for \$700 - \$800. That is a huge lift in value that allows me to make a return from the timberland that I own and manage as well as a return on my sawmill and equipment investment. It also allows me to offer lumber to local woodworkers that would otherwise have to drive two hours to Atlanta and pay high retail prices.

The Re-Sharp program is perfect for me. I focus on high quality and not quantity, so sharpening my own blades would not be cost effective. I have found the Re-sharp service to be outstanding in turn-around time and in blade quality.

It is amazing to me the lift that I can achieve in my timber investment on my 200 acres of property by sawing a high quality product and selling the product rather than just selling the timber. The sawmill allows me to gain a lift over ten-fold more than the market value of the timber stumpage.

I am going to expand the furniture side of my business. Although small, I am happy with the volume of lumber at this point... it fits my property, equipment, and business strategy well. I can make a little money and really enjoy what I am doing. I get to meet all kinds of interesting people. This creates a lot of exposure for the mill and most are interested in the process, and it allows me to brag on how great a product the mill is and the great service provided by Wood-Mizer. And, believe me, I do brag!