

Northfield furniture store offers customized pieces



Staff photo by Michael Ein

Russell Schanker, of the Manahawkin section of Stafford Township, left, and Joseph Czyzewicz, of Mays Landing, own Atlantic City Dinettes & Barstools. 'We wanted to provide better quality and give (clients) the option to pick what they want, not just what the store shows,' Schanker says.

A.C. Dinettes & Barstools focuses on American-made items

By ELAINE ROSE
Staff Writer

NORTHFIELD — The showroom at Atlantic City Dinettes & Barstools is packed with things to sit on, but the quirky accessories are more likely to catch a visitor's eye.

Brownies, cups of coffee and salads are realistic enough to make your mouth water, but are ... alas ... inedible. Vases, whimsical animal sculptures and wall hangings vie for your attention.

Four slot machines along the back wall are for sale, though they are there mostly to fit an Atlantic City theme.

But it is the furniture, almost all of it American-made, that makes up the bulk of the business run by brothers Russell Schanker and Joseph Czyzewicz.

"Some people are very specific about what they want, and if it doesn't exist, we'll make it exist," Schanker said.

That's right. If the owners can't find what a customer is looking for from the 75 manufacturers they deal with and more than 30,000 available designs, Atlantic City Dinettes & Barstools will make it. Roland Simeon, of Galloway Township, is the master craftsman.

"He can turn a tree into the nicest piece of furniture you can imagine," Schanker said.

Schanker, 44, of Manahawkin, and Czyzewicz, 43, of Mays Landing, have been selling furniture together for 20 years.

"Most of the furniture today comes

Atlantic City Dinettes & Barstools

Location: 254 Tilton Road,
Northfield

Owners: Russell Schanker, of
Stafford Township, and Joseph
Czyzewicz, of Mays Landing.

Started: 1991

Employees: 5

Phone: 609-646-6464

from China, and we wanted to provide better quality and give (clients) the option to pick what they want, not just what the store shows," Schanker said.

They opened their first shop in Ocean Township, Monmouth County, in 1991, and moved to Mays Landing in 2000, Schanker said. They moved to Northfield two years ago for the chance to attract summer visitors. The store also gets a lot more walk-in traffic on Tilton Road.

The brothers work with small-scale manufacturers from around the country, and many of their pieces are made by Amish craftsmen in Pennsylvania, Schanker said.

The brothers and their staff know about each product, who made it and how it fits the customer's needs, Czyzewicz said. Items are available in all price ranges, from modest to high-end, for residential and commercial use.

Some people buy furniture that is in stock, but most want it customized,

Schanker said.

"Everything can be made the way you want it," Schanker said. "You pick the finish, you pick the fabric."

Wood comes in several colors, but customers also pick the type of wood they want, Schanker said.

Some people want the owners to design their entire home, in which case they will come up with living-room and bedroom furniture as well, said Czyzewicz, who studied interior design. Their commercial ventures include staging homes for real-estate agents and decorators, and furnishing some casino restaurants.

The brothers attend a few furniture shows a year, and sometimes get closeouts for customers looking for a bargain, Czyzewicz said. That's also where they pick up the knickknacks that draw in quite a few browsers.

Some small jobs can be done in back of the store, but most custom work is done at a warehouse in Egg Harbor Township, Schanker said.

The brothers also try to be active in the community, and often donate furniture to charities, schools and others, Czyzewicz said.

The store has its own delivery service, and Czyzewicz said he often rides the truck to drop off the finished product.

"It's nice, because we're there from the beginning to the end," Czyzewicz said. "We design the set, we order the set, and we're there to see what it looks like in the house."

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Barstool

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Czyzewicz said that observation is true for the Barstool Brothers. However, it's difficult to determine if foot traffic is inconsistent because of the economy, or because more people are shopping online.

"It used to be you could count on the amount of customers that would come in the store on a weekly or monthly basis," Czyzewicz said. "Now it's sort of a rollercoaster. There's a lull and then a lot of people, then a lull and a

lot of people."

Currently, the business is revamping its website, he said, and is looking into selling products online.

The furnishings association represents 8,000 independently owned furnishings business in the US, Canada, and Puerto Rico. "For the most part, we're anything from 'mom and pops' to large and medium independent chains," Bradley said.

She said that as the economy improves, furniture stores are actually facing new challenges in the way of marketing. As younger generations age, they have new ways of

shopping. Younger buyers tend to research and become knowledgeable about which products they are interested in.

Czyzewicz said his business has strong ties with customers in the community.

"We have become friends with our customers. In a family business, that's what happens," Czyzewicz said. "In the local economy, we're waiting to see what's going to happen. We try to see outside the box and do different things."

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Atlantic City Barstool Brothers Furniture & Design

Featured In: The Press
September 30, 2014