

Rob Smart, Bob's son, has worked in the business since he was 14. Here, he strips down a chair in the back shop area.



Smart business

Upholsterer blends hard work, patriotism in successful shop

By Casey Hane
Staff writer

Bob Smart is a patriotic sort of guy. He loves the red, white and blue and he loves his community too.

The owner of Garden City Upholstery in the downtown Farmington is a longtime Farmington Hills resident, and is pleased to be filling the crest of two people's wishes these days.

"We recycle furniture, and all our products are made in America," he said proudly.

Smart bought his business to the site of the former Farmington Chamber on Grand River last August and, in addition to himself and wife Marilyn, keeps several people busy, including his son Rob and employees Dick Gray and Irma Szczepank.

The upholstery shop was originally in Garden City, then in Livonia for 12 years before moving to Farmington. "We're not going anywhere now," he added.

Smart attributes his successful and busy shop to one thing: "Just hard work. We work at it," he said. "Every day we work at it and we get better and better and better."

know your neighbor

"We can hustle when we have to," he added. "They want the best job they can get, and that's what we give 'em."

SMART'S BUSINESS story is an inspiration. More than 20 years ago, he lost his job with a major food chain. He worked odd jobs for four years, having to rely on welfare to feed his family before getting a break at the upholstery shop he eventually bought.

The owner sold the business to him "dirt cheap" giving him an opportunity to fulfill a lifelong dream.

"I've always wanted my own business, ever since I got home from the Korean War," he said. "I just fell into it, and we made it pay."

Smart grew up in a large family, smacking corn for 50 cents a day and delivering newspapers and caddyng to make a few bucks. He ran off to join the Army at the age of 16 to

avoid the pitfalls of the streets, using his brother's birth certificate to sign up for the Korean War.

The Army didn't catch on until he left four years later. He said he was too young to see in World War II, but newsreels of the patriotic feeling of the time left him and his friends eager to try.

Today, Smart boasts not only a self-made business, but a family of six children — one son and five daughters. He plans someday to leave the business in the hands of his 32-year-old son who has worked there since he was 14 years old.

UPHOLSTERING furniture is more than just hanging a material covering, Smart explained. Sometimes it meant cutting down legs, changing the type of a piece, or even combining chairs into a loveseat or sofa.

"There's real joy in it all — it's a



photos by SHARON LAMICUX/staff photographer

Longtime Farmington Hills resident Bob Smart sits in a recently recovered chair at his downtown Farmington business, Garden City Uphol-

stery on Grand River. He takes pride in the business, where, he says, "we recycle furniture, and all our products are made in America."

very skilled trade," he said. "A doctor knows where to cut and so do we."

"I try to sell them a product they're going to get some use from."

The most interesting job the shop had was upholstering of a coffin — a job for a local rock band that used it as a prop. They have also done boats and recreational vehicle projects and upholstered bars.

His business acumen was rewarded in 1986 when Smart was named Small Businessman of the Year by the Livonia Chamber of Commerce. He now belongs to the Farmington Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce, and has gotten involved by joining civic groups in the area, such

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— Bob Smart
owner, Garden City Upholstery

as the Optimists and Elks.

Smart also served on the public safety committee for the Farmington Hills Year 2000 study which, he said, gave him a new respect for the city.

"I've watched this go from a town-

ship to a city," he said. "I never thought I would stay in one place this long. I lived in Garden City, Walled Lake, Livonia, then I got here and didn't leave."

"You feel safe here. It's a great city."

Common sense helps curb automobile theft

By Kim Kemsle
Staff writer

The car is stolen every 19 seconds in the United States, and vehicle theft in Farmington Hills increased 73 percent in 1991 compared to 1990. According to the FBI Uniform Crime Reports, Michigan ranks 10th nationwide in vehicle theft per 100,000 population. Detroit ranks 5th for its number of auto thefts in the country.

Part of the last five nationwide is due to insurance fraud. The National Auto Theft Bureau attributes 15 percent of theft reports to fraud. Some local insurance companies believe that the rate of fraudulent claims is actually closer to 30 percent.

Although the American public tends to be apathetic toward preventing vehicle theft, it is not a victimless crime. Approximately 10 percent of our personal income is spent on buying and maintaining our vehicles. Even though most owners are insured and don't always feel the economic impact of auto theft directly, the local vehicle theft rate is a key factor in determining insurance premiums. As the crime rate increases, so will insurance rates.

Another important factor in vehicle theft is that some stolen cars are used to commit violent crimes, provide money to drug users, or for joy-



riding, which sometimes results in injury or death.

INDIVIDUALS NEED to take responsibility for reducing their own risk of vehicle theft by consistently practicing a few common sense actions:

- Roll up the windows, lock the doors and pocket the key, whether you leave your car a minute or several hours.
- Always try to park in a busy and well-lit area.
- Park your car in your garage. If you have one, and close the door. If you park on the street turn your wheels sharply to the curb.

- Leave on the ignition key with a parking attendant and make sure no identifying information is attached.

- Avoid leaving personal identification documents, keys or credit cards anywhere in the vehicle. Carry your auto registration with you.

- When you place packages or valuables in your car put them in the trunk or cover them up. If possible, remove cellphones, CBs, or stereo components from their brackets and put them in a secure location when you park or take them inside with you.

- Always report suspicious people and activities to the police immediately when you see them. Report abandoned cars to police.

- Consider installing anti-theft devices, such as steering column locks, alarms or a "kill" switch that disables the starter when the engine is turned off. Remember that any serious anti-theft device must do more than just make noise.

- Don't spend money on anti-theft devices unless you plan to follow the suggestions of precautions. If you purchase anti-theft devices, use them.

Kim Kemsle is a crime prevention technician with the Farmington Hills Police Department.

Hills cops plan seminar on fighting rubber checks

The Farmington Hills Police Department's crime prevention section will host a seminar about what you can do to protect yourself from bad checks.

Scheduled for 9 a.m. Thursday, Feb. 27, at the Farmington Hills City Council chamber, the seminar is free, but reservations are required by Friday, Feb. 21.

The Oakland County Prosecutor's office recently revised its policy on bad check cases. If you wish to fully protect yourself against the potential financial impact of bad checks, this seminar is a must, according to Farmington Hills police.

Every year, millions of dollars are lost by Oakland County businesses through bad checks. Featured speak-

ers will be Detective Sgt. Charles Nebus of the Farmington Hills police department's detective bureau, and Ronald Norton of Comerica Bank's loss prevention department.

The following topics will be addressed at the seminar:

- What you can do to prevent bad checks.
- What to do after you receive a bad check.
- How the police department follows up on bad checks.

For more information and for RSVP, call the crime prevention section at 473-9640, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays.

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