

Zack Schaffer – Schaffer Furniture

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

The Facebook post came from Mike Rowe, the nationally-known television host and advocate for American workers. His post featured a beautiful rocking chair and the craftsman who made it in the heartland of rural Kansas. This is today's Kansas Profile.

Zack Schaffer is the owner, founder and sole employee of Schaffer Furniture which was recently featured on Mike Rowe's Facebook page. Zack grew up on a farm and ranch near Jetmore. "I took wood shop in high school to avoid calculus and trigonometry," Zack said. He majored in industrial technology at Fort Hays State.

Zack specialized in making hand-crafted wooden furniture. Due to the fact that there were no fine furniture makers nearby, his required internship for degree completion was the implementation of a self-directed project in fine furniture making. He designed and built a cherry Queen Anne style highboy.

"For the tools I had at the time, it was phenomenal, but looking back it was pretty crude," Zack said. After graduation, Zack moved back to the ranch and got married. During off times or after chores were done, Zack continued to work with wood.

He started working in his dad's shop, a converted two car garage. He watched videos, became a self-taught craftsman, improved his craft, and started selling his handmade wood products. In September 2017 Zack bought a building on the main street in Jetmore, expanded his inventory of tools and opened Schaffer Furniture.

Today, Schaffer Furniture is shipping its handmade products from Philadelphia to California. Each item is custom-built. "A bed is kind of a standard design for anybody, but a chair has to fit each individual person," Zack said. Zack designs his chairs to support the lumbar region and take stress off the sciatic nerve. He produces rocking chairs, other chairs, cribs, desks, bar stools, and more.

His raw wood comes from all over the U.S. "I get slabs from Oregon to New York," Zack said. His wood rasps come from France. Through word of mouth, his products have become known for their craftsmanship. "One guy in DC bought a chair for his mom," Zack said.

Zack is also a fan of Mike Rowe, the host of television shows such as Dirty Jobs on the Discovery Channel and the CNN series Somebody's Gotta Do It. Zack especially appreciated his creation of the mikeroweWORKS Foundation which supports those working in the skilled trades.

Zack decided to send Mike Rowe a handmade rocking chair. "It was meant as a gift to thank him for what he's doing," Zack said. When Mike Rowe got the rocking chair, he posted a response on Facebook on March 16, 2018. Here's an excerpt:

"Zack Shaffer is a wheat farmer in Jetmore, Kansas. He runs 200 head of cattle. He lives with his wife Renee and their new son, Henry... When Zack's not farming, he's making furniture... Zack made me a rocking chair. It arrived at my home today. It's made of solid walnut, and it's stunning... Here's the thing about Zack. I don't know him from Adam. He's just a farmer who called my office one day and said, "Hi, I'm Zack. I make furniture and I love what mikeroweWORKS is doing. I'd like to send Mike a handmade rocking chair, as a token of my appreciation. Do you think he'd like a handmade rocking chair?" Who says "no" to a handmade rocking chair? I'm not only humbled by Zack's

gift, I'm blown away by his craftsmanship. Here's a young man, raising a family in America's heartland by growing the food we eat, and making something as beautiful as it is useful. By hand. One piece at a time...I called Zack Shaffer this morning to thank him for his gift. He was impossibly gracious...We talked about his grandparents, Dan and Ruby. We talked about the challenges of farming, and of furniture making...I think he does amazing work."

I'm proud that this craftsman is found in the rural community of Jetmore, population 867 people. Now, that's rural. For more information, see www.schafferfurniture.com.

We commend Zack Schaffer for making a difference with his craftsmanship and entrepreneurship. I think it rocks.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.