

Stone mason chisels a living out of old craft

BY KAREN SMITH
COMMUNITY EDITOR



The new stone planters in downtown Clarkston are a product of John Shell's company.

When he was 8 years old, John Shell got a job assisting a stone mason down the street.

Twenty-nine years later, the Springfield Township resident is still working with stone.

"I stayed interested in it because of consistently challenging myself to take the next step," said Shell, owner of Creative Stone in Davisburg.

Shell started out "carrying rocks around" for the stone mason in the Southfield neighborhood where he grew up.

Today, he builds facades for cemetery mausoleums, bridges for golf courses, fireplaces and solid stone columns for mansions.



PLEASE SEE SHELL, A5 Stone mason John Shell uses a hammer and chisel to cut stone by hand at his Davisburg business.

SHELL

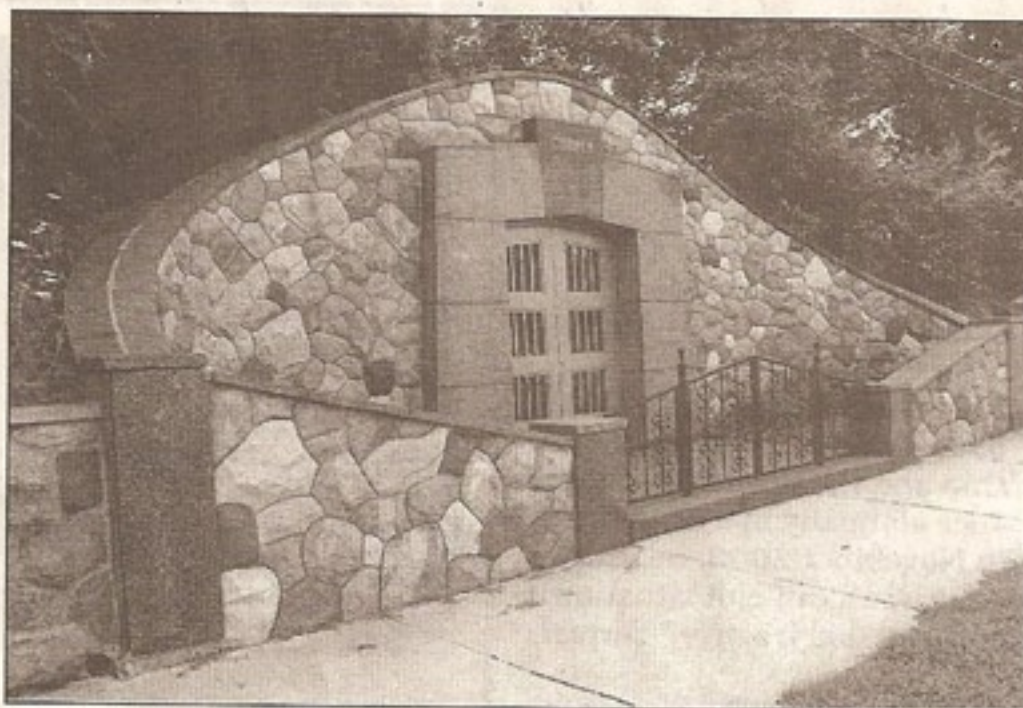
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Just recently, he was contracted by the Clarkston Farm and Garden Club to build a dozen stone planters for downtown Clarkston.

"He did a wonderful job," said Clarkston Mayor Sharron Catalo, a member of the Farm and Garden Club. "I can't imagine anything better."

Made of Michigan field stones, the planters blend perfectly with the stone on historic buildings, decorative walls and homes in the city, she said: "He captured exactly what everyone had been looking for."

Shell learned masonry the old-fashioned way, as an apprentice. He trained under several masons, including the one in Southfield who gave him and four of his five brothers their first jobs.



John Shell built this mausoleum at Lakeview Cemetery on Holcomb Road at Dixie Highway.

Shell was the only one of the boys to make stone masonry his profession. "I have a hard time sitting behind a desk," he said. "I'm a hands-on guy. I need to feel that satisfaction of completing something at the

end of the day."

Shell, who does most of his work with a hand chisel, is self-employed. His wife, Laurie, does the computer and book work. Their four children, ages 5 to 14, also assist.

Business has fluctuated over the years with the demands of home builders and buyers, Shell said. For a time, aluminum siding was the fad. Now stone is becoming more popular again.

"It's reverted back to the '20s with classic Tudors and estates," Shell said.

Lately, stone planters, benches and arbors have become popular choices for gardens, so Shell has started a new side business specializing in those products, Davisburg Stone Co.

One thing that has remained the same over the years is the quality of Michigan stone, Shell's favorite to work with. "It's got the most color, but it's also the most difficult to work with," he said.

But that makes it challenging — and keeps Shell interested in the ages-old profession.

ksmith@oe.homecomm.net |
(248) 651-7575, ext. 14