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FROM Westside Today

Something Old Made Something New

A Family Business of Leather Refurbishing Brings New Meaning to Keepsakes



When the father and son team of Dick and Rick Bublitz of Woodland Hills got into the business of refurbishing leather goods, they had no idea of the emotional investment they were making. As they took in customers' items through their franchise company, Fibrenew, customers would tell them of the cherished memories that the items represented.

"One customer brought me this old ottoman. It wasn't a fine piece of furniture by any means, but it was something that was in his family home as a child, and he wanted to preserve it," says Rick, the son, who is the craftsman of the business.

Looking at the before photos, it seemed as if the mottled turquoise and yellowed white vinyl footstool was beyond repair, with its ripped-open top and its inner stuffing exposed, but after the junior Bublitz



had worked his magic, it looked like new again, shiny and mended, with no signs of the former busted seams.

"It's seeing peoples' reactions when they get their items back that really makes us realize how appreciated our work is," says the elder Bublitz.

While the Bublitz's can restore a variety of items to like-new condition, from car seats to purses, it is the keepsake items that often require the most craftsmanship. It is easier to simply mend, dye and condition old leather items, but it is more challenging to restore items without changing their character, unless of course that is desired.

Some customers will bring items that are worn out and faded, such as an old pair of boots, and rather than have them brought back to their former state, the items can be refurbished to give



them a new look, such as a different color.

The economic downturn has been a boon for the refurbishing business as customers choose to repair and restore older items rather than buy new ones. As Rick points out, refurbishing is good for the environment as it encourages people to recycle, reduce and reuse.

“There are a lot of old leather items that are not made with the same quality today, so it’s much better to restore the old ones than buy new ones,” said Bublitz.

A lot of the items in the Bublitz’s portfolio fall into the Fibrenew specialty areas of repair in the aviation, automotive, commercial, marine and residential categories, but you can tell by the way Rick lovingly pores over the pages of personal items, like a prized basketball and a favorite armchair, that these are the jobs that bring the most pleasure and pride.

“This one took a long time,” he says looking at the retro turquoise ottoman, “If the customer took this to someone else he wouldn’t have been able to afford what it would really cost to repair it.”

Rick explains that after he heard why the ottoman was so special he didn’t mind putting in the extra time to get it right.

“He was really happy with it, and now he can pass it down to his kids,” he beams.

For more information on leather refurbishing, go to www.fibrenew.com/west.

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