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What I Do: Stone carver masters craft that has permanence

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By JILL CARLSON | For the State Journal | jillcarlson1957@gmail.com | Posted: Monday, October 19, 2009 4:00 pm | No Comments Posted



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Eric Kudrna, a stone carver at Quarra Stone, has been working on his craft for 12 years, starting out by cutting granite countertops. Photo by: MIKE DeVRIES - The Capital Times

Name: Eric Kudrna

Age: 41

Occupation: Stone carver at Quarra Stone, 333 Atlas Ave.

Website: www.quarrastone.com

Number of years on the job: 12

Stone carving is a centuries-old art that preserves our architectural heritage. I've been privileged to work on some historic landmarks including the Kansas State Capitol, U.S. Capitol Visitor Center in

Washington, D.C., and the Harkness Tower at Yale University.

Each of these projects takes several years to complete. For example, the Kansas State Capitol is a four-year project, and I'm currently in the second year. The building is a Corinthian design, and one of the projects is hand-carving/restoring some modillions, which are decorative brackets. I travel to Kansas to blend the pieces in with the original structure. I also supervise a crew of 10 carvers from Kansas. The modillions are made from stone that is indigenous to Kansas.

I started my career by cutting granite countertops for a company in Chicago. I worked with my brother Chuck who is also a stone carver and learned a lot from him. There isn't a school in this country where you can go to learn how to be a stone carver. I took a design course at Columbia College in Chicago but, for the most part, I'm self-taught.

There are very few stone carvers left in the U.S. Quarra brought some master stone carvers from Germany over here to show us the traditional methods that they are trained in over in Europe. Working alongside the German carvers really helped to hone my skills.

In the Harkness Tower, there are several figures including founders of the university, Greek Gods and others. One figure is missing an arm and it's my job to replace the arm. But there isn't a record of how the arm was positioned. Yale researchers have been trying to find a photo or drawing of the structure before the arm fell off but haven't been able to locate one. I'm waiting to complete that project as I want to make sure the arm I make is historically correct.

I'm motivated by being involved in something that has the permanence of being carved in stone. I think about the original carvers of the building and the work they did. It's my responsibility to ensure that I remain true to the original design and that I don't damage anything while using tools to blend in the newly created pieces. I've been very lucky in that I've never damaged anything.

What I Do invites people to tell in their own words what they do to earn a living. The column runs every Tuesday. To suggest someone to feature, contact Jill Carlson at jillcarlson1957@gmail.com.

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