



Veteran-owned Business

Description

A Happy Place for Woodworkers

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Eagle River Sawmill and Kiln owner **Ron Wehrli** directs work in the yard of his US Service Veteran-owned business on Eagle River Loop Road

My woodshop is my Happy Place. It is crowded and may look disorganized, but I try to do something to upgrade it after every major project I finish. The result is a lot of tools at various stations to perform specific functions. Those stations sometimes have to be cleared for use, but they still allow for consistent accurate production. So, when I decided to do a story on

Eagle River Sawmill and Kiln, I knew finding the right time to approach the owner, **Ron Wehrli**, was the key to hearing what he valued as a local businessman doing something unique.



<https://eagleriversawmill.com/>

That best time to hit Wehrli up was a recent Monday morning as he was just starting a new business week. We sat on the tailgate of his truck and talked about his business achievement. Wehrli has done a lot in his life in over 60 years, and with this business he started doing something small—turning wood pens and bottle stoppers.



Custom pens made by Wehrli are in his business showcase.

Wehrli has built his business on what he knew he could be successful doing.



An array of wood for projects can be found at Eagle River Sawmill and Kiln.

Wehrli explained: *I have been in construction most of my working life except a few years in the Marine Corps. I came up here (to Alaska) in '81 and found myself doing commercial fishing, working on platforms on the Slope, throughout bush Alaska, and various jobs around the state. In 1999 I took the tool belt off around my waist and put a tie on around my neck to manage construction development—first for **Alaska Housing Finance Corporation** about 6 years, then moved over to **Cook Inlet Housing Authority**, doing the same thing for about the same period of time.*

He chose to live in Eagle River in 1993.



The showroom at Eagle River Sawmill and Kiln features a variety of amazing wooden products.

Wehrli then spent some time in Prince William Sound living on a boat, and upon moving back to Southcentral

terra firma he took up woodturning—with a lathe.

That was fun but I decided I would like to make some things from shimmering birch burl, Wehrli continued. So I bought a birch burl that required a loader to put it into my truck. Then my dilemma was what could I do with it? All I could do was whittle the damn thing with the saws I had.



Wehrli took that burl to somebody who could cut slabs from it, and became interested in the machine used to do it, known as an LT28 Woodmizer portable sawmill.[1]

Wehrli continued: *I asked my friend who owned it: “What’s a machine like that going to cost?” He said: “Ron, having a sawmill is like building your shop; when you get it all done and stand back, look at it, you will say: “it sure is nice but it’s already too small!” So I ended up purchasing the LT 40 Wide Hydraulic Portable Sawmill.[2].*

From a woodworker’s perspective, such as myself, this is a very good thing to have in the neighborhood.



We do some dimensional lumber but mostly we do specialty lumber—live-edge slabs, explained Wehrli. I have various other machines to do a variety of milling jobs. We also just unpacked our new Lucas has 72” dedicated slabber. [3]



The Lucas dedicated slabber has been assembled and with some cribbing for a base will soon be making slabs from large logs and burls.

Wehrli continued: *I had the woodshop here for the first couple of years; hiring people to saw, sand and drill, and when a customer walked in and I had to tell my help to stop because we can't hear. So a buddy of mine let me use a little space in his shop at another location in Chugiak. I moved a commercial slab flattening table there—the slabmeiser—which will do a 6-ft wide by 18-ft long by 8-in thick slab. [4]*



A River Table is made from a slab of wood enhanced with modern epoxy products available at Eagle River Sawmill and Kiln.

Wehrli continued: *River tables have become very popular so I was able to land the state distributorship for the [5]Mas Epoxy, Wisebond Epoxy [6] and Rubio Monicoat. [7] with others on the horizon.*

17141 N. Eagle River Loop Rd. #2, Eagle River, AK 99577

This is a great location for my business—moved here in June of 2018. Once here I decided, “well I have a sawmill, might as well build a kiln,” said Wehrli.



Green wood is stacked in this kiln and heated to provide a final product that would take years to air dry naturally.

Moisture content in wood determines whether it is stable for use and long-term integrity. I have myself cut slabs from birch trees and they have to dry out at least one year before use. Eagle River Sawmill and Kiln can process any species of Alaskan wood and features wood imported from elsewhere, too. A kiln hastens that process and kills all insect larva, moss, and stabilizes other growths, too.



Black walnut planks are cut from a large log recently at Eagle River Sawmill and Kiln. This will be dried in the kiln before being available for purchase. Imagine the amazing river table for a board conference room made from these matched planks!

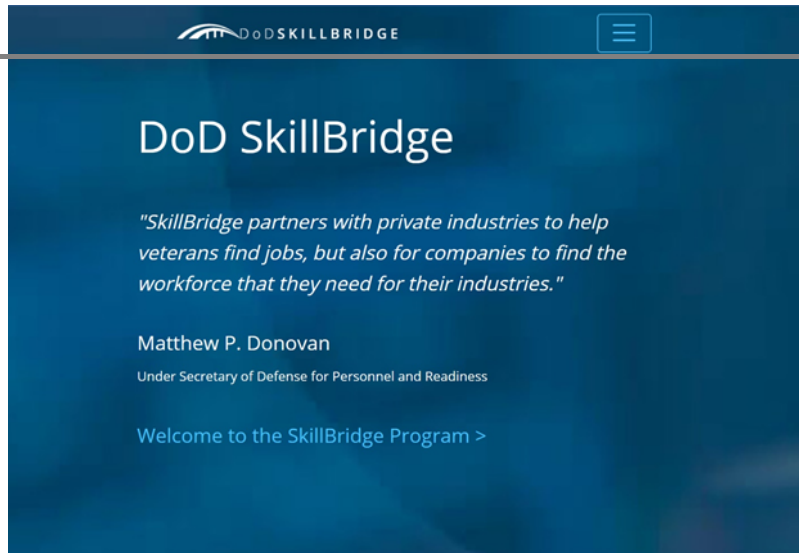
The People Matter in this Business

I see the caliber of people who walk into my store from all over the state as being top-notch and project-driven, said Wehrli. They have been living in that house most of the time for a year and this is a time to freshen it up with perhaps a new fireplace mantel, headboard, counter tops, shelving or a dazzling river table.

The people I hire possess great attitudes with a desire to work in this business.



*We are local folks serving the local community. I am partial to hiring veterans, said Wehrli. I am assembling a good crew; I have David who is going to be retiring out of the Air Force—E9 off the flight deck who came in through the **Skillbridge Program**. During the last six months of obligated military service participants in that program can report to a civilian employer with approval by the commanding officer. He is skilled in operations and will contribute greatly to our operation. [7]*



Another employee is Amber who is has some background in epoxy resin application, said Wehrli. She is a great worker who takes care of things.



EagleExit.com

Q: As an Eagle River business how do you feel about the attempt to detach Assembly District 2 from the Municipality of Anchorage?

*A: Overall you have to wade through what the two sides are talking about but I am leaning toward thinking it is a good thing. The further away we are from the authority having jurisdiction the less bang we get for our buck. There are a lot of good people behind **EagleExit** and personally I support them.*

References:

[1] Wood-Meizer LT-28 Portable Sawmill

<https://woodmizer.com/us/LT28-Portable-Sawmill>

[2] Wood-Meizer LT-40 Portable Sawmill

<https://woodmizer.com/us/LT40-Hydraulic-Portable-Sawmill>

[3] Lucas Dedicated Slabber

<https://www.lucasmill.com/Portable-Timber-Sawmills/Slabbing-Mills/Dedicated-Slabbing-Mill>

[4] Wood-Meizer MB200 Slab Flattener

<https://woodmizer.com/us/SlabMizer-MB200-Slab-Flattener>

[5] Mas Epoxy

<https://masepoxies.com/>

[6] WiseBond Epoxy

<https://www.wisebond.com/>

[7] Rubio Monicoat

<https://www.rubimonocoatusa.com/>

[8] Department of Defense Skillbridge Program

<https://dodskillbridge.usalearning.gov/>

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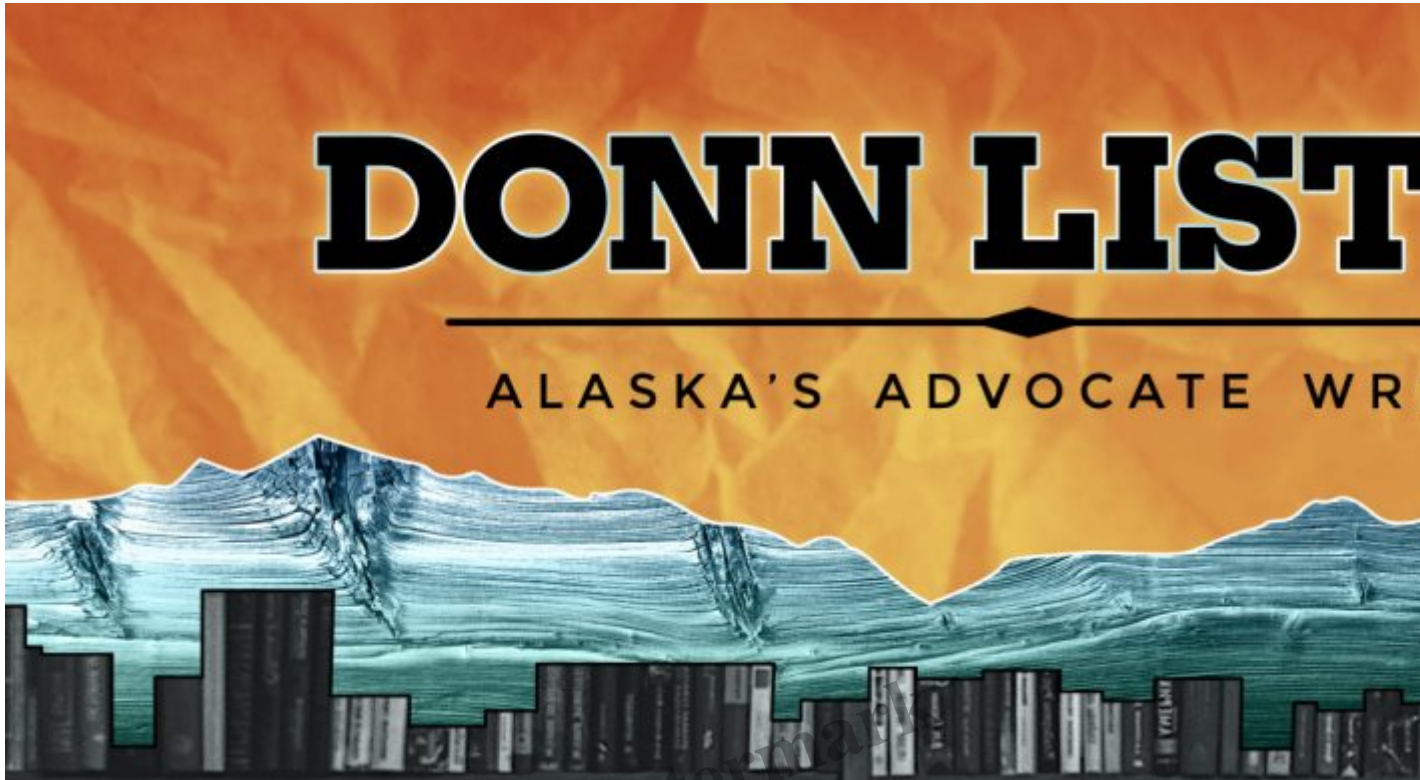
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