

Sign People



Boardwalk SIGNS & GRAPHICS

Company: Boardwalk Signs & Graphics Inc., Lynn Haven, Fla.

Owners: Joe and Sandy Pafoon

Specialties: Dimensional Signs

Years in business: 6

JOE AND SANDY PAFOON, owners of Boardwalk Signs & Graphics Inc., located in Lynn Haven, Fla., used to install hardwood floors in Atlanta for a company named Boardwalk Woodshop. That company was started around 1985 when they also dabbled in making fireplace mantles and eventually started to make hand-carved signs too.

When the Pafoons moved to Panama City, Fla. to retire, a friend sold Joe an old Ioline plotter and said, "Why don't you make some vinyl signs?"



Joe and Sandy Pafoon, owners of Boardwalk Signs & Graphics.

BY PAMELA ROBINSON



The Magnolia & Ivy sign has lathe-turned and hand carved laminated HDU elements, silver leaf, black Krylon and automotive enamel.

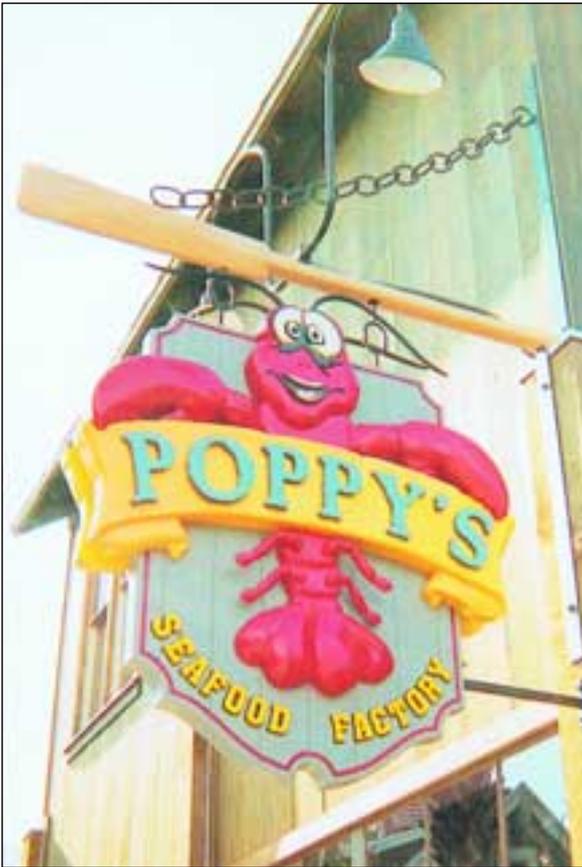
So, not knowing if he would make yard signs or return to hardwood flooring, Pafoon simply named the company Boardwalk. He explains the simplistic name saying, "That way, when people called and asked if we did hardwood floors, we'd say, 'Oh yeah, sure.' If someone called and asked if we did signs, we'd say, 'Oh sure. Yeah, we do signs.'"

BUILDING AND ADDING

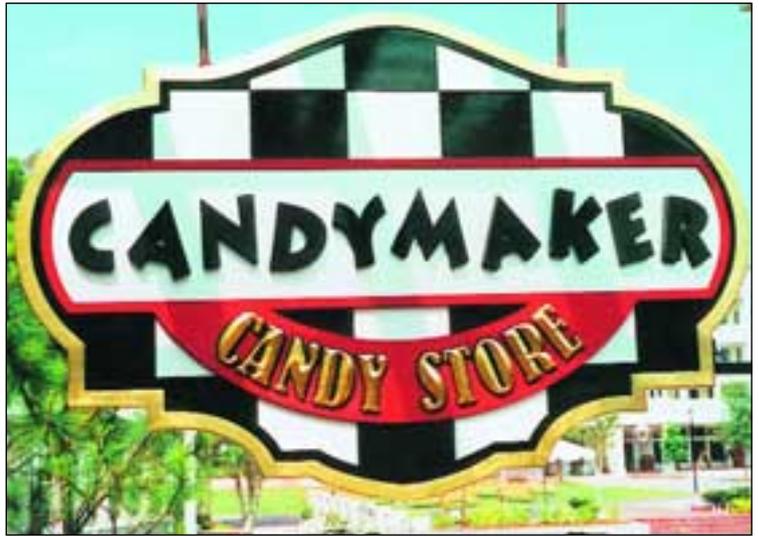
Boardwalk was started as a business that Joe and Sandy ran from a 10' x 10' bedroom in their house. And then, as they continued working on flooring and sign projects over time, obviously signs won out. So officially they've been making signs since 1997. From 1997 up to this point, they've grown from a business run out of their bedroom to working out of a 1,000 square foot warehouse.

Having retired to the new business in Florida, they now find themselves busier than ever before. Gone are the days of hardwood floor installations. Boardwalk Signs & Graphics, as the newer name implies, focuses on sign projects and offers services from design to installation. They work with vinyl, gold leafing, sand blasting, dimensional, architectural and monument signs. Their shop includes a Gerber 408 plotter, a Model 5100

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The sign for Poppy's Seafood Factory, on Baytown Wharf is made of laminated SignFoam panels and PVC bases; cut on a Gerber 408 router, hand carved and spray painted.



This sign has 202 separate pieces cut on the router. Two 1 1/2" main panels carved to shape and inset carved to receive all of the individual elements are laminated back-to-back with a stainless steel H-frame to support the weight.



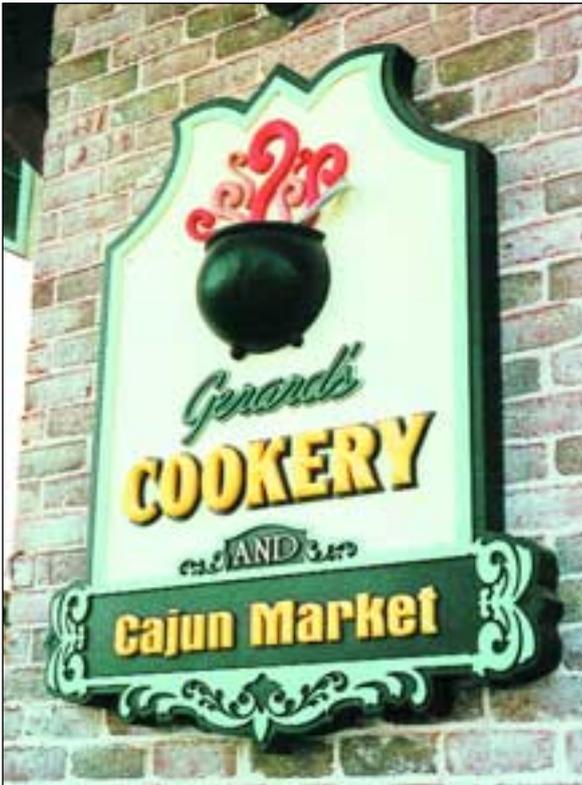
This panel is 1 1/2" HDU cut to shape, with hand carved incised lettering. The cameo is airbrushed, clear coated and applied separately; ANP gooseneck lighting.



Roberto's Pizzeria sign is made with HDU, laminated with West System Epoxy and hand carved. Letters are prismatic cut 3/4" HDU on 1/4" PVC. The custom welded frame is mounted to white-washed poplar and externally lit.



This bar & grill sign is another Baytown Wharf project, measuring 130" x 65" and is mounted to existing wharf timbers. Made of multiple pieces of 3/4" MDO backer board with 1/4" PVC "HammerHead" letters painted black. The blue letters on top are 1 1/2" flat-cut HDU and the sun is 1/2" HDU. The shark is 1 1/2" HDU cut to shape, stack laminated and then hand carved.



A 15-lb. SignFoam panel, flat-mounted onto the brick building face, features a profile border of 2" thick stacked HDU and PVC pads. The lettering is 1/4" stacked PVC painted with black Krylon; the pot is HDU cut to shape and turned on a lathe and spray painted with black satin Krylon. The flames are painted with Benjamin Moore latex paint.



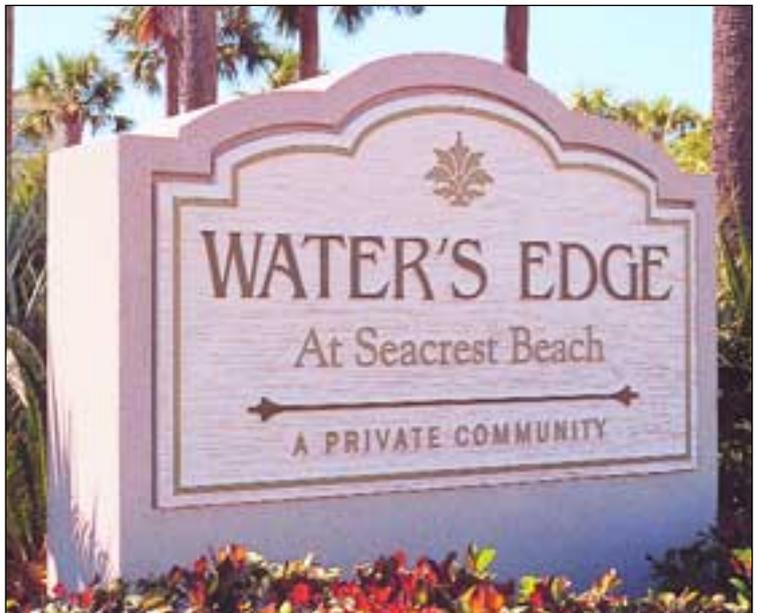
This post blade sign is made of 3/4" and 1/2" sheet PVC panels, V-cut and hot folded to fabricate the post system. The upper swing arm is 1/2" PVC V-cut and folded and attached with a custom routed insert into the upright post. The 1/2" PVC profile-cut blank is used as a 90-degree fill-in; painted automotive black with 23-karat gold leaf accents and post caps.

Graphtec vinyl plotter, and software packages from Omega and CorelDRAW.

The company is now a large, well-established business with nine employees on the payroll. "We've got to keep building it. We realized that in this area we couldn't be a mom-and-pop business and make enough, so we just keep building and adding employees," Pafoon says.

QUALITY BUILDS BUSINESS

While most of the employees work on the design, construction and installation of signs, Glenda Reynolds devotes her time to the book-



The Water's Edge sign is a polystyrene shell cut on the Gerber router, recessed for the HDU sign panel and coated with Acrocrete synthetic stucco. The sign panel is 1 1/2" 15-lb. SignFoam, sand blasted through a wire frame; latex paint; mounted on 4" steel posts.

keeping and administrative end of the business, and Sandy is *Boardwalk's* only sales force. Joe refers to her position as a *closer* – because she doesn't make cold calls on potential customers.

Pafoon explains that, "Heretofore, we've done no advertising! It's all been word of mouth." Sandy's responsibility is to go out and meet the customer, get their information and specifications, and bring it back to our shop. The design team comes up with three or four designs for the customer, which Sandy then presents to the customer for selection and approval. "It's amazing," Pafoon says. "Because our work is known, everybody just calls us!"

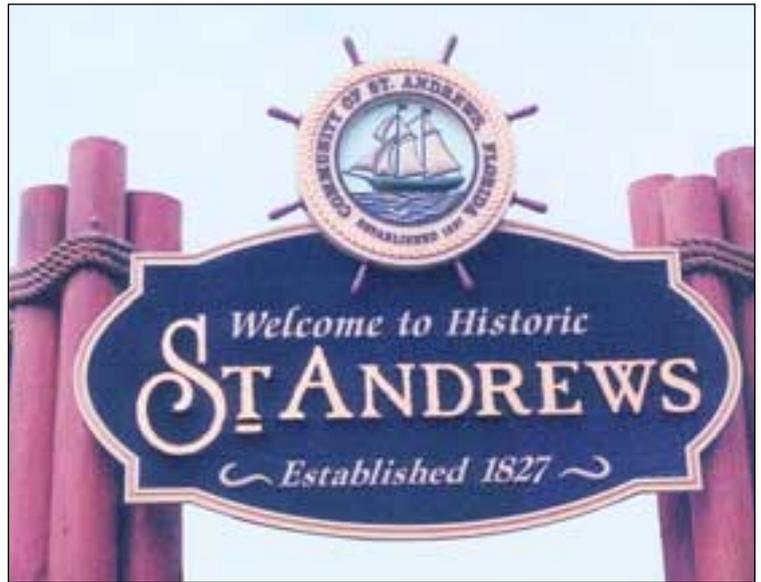
Pafoon attributes the company's success to "extremely good customer service... and high quality signage." He knows that there are many people out there who buy a vinyl machine and suddenly call

BOARDWALK SIGNS & GRAPHICS

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(Left) Wrought iron brackets, attached to distressed poplar support this sign blank made of two 1 1/2" pieces of 15-lb. SignFoam, pocket-carved to receive the four elements that are glued with West System epoxy. Two internal 1/2" rods facilitate mounting. The panel was sand blasted to achieve a stone texture; the four elements are routed SignFoam and painted with Benjamin Moore latex paint.



The combined elements of this sign welcome visitors to the town of St. Andrews back to another era with the nautical feel of an old fishing village.

themselves sign professionals, but, he says, that's not all it takes to build a sign business.

FINDING YOUR NICHE

Boardwalk bought their first router, a Gerber 408, in 1999 and from thereon the business has grown exponentially and has become a full-service sign company. "We've really gone into dimensional signs and that has emerged as our business. We bill ourselves as Northwest Florida's Premier Dimensional Sign Specialist. That is where we've found our little niche. Mike Sheehan, over in Pensacola (Classic Sign & Mirror), and I are about the only two signmakers in this area who do this type of thing. Of course he's been in it a lot longer than I have, but we're the only two and we do pretty compatible work," Pafoon says.

Monument signs have become very popular in Florida. They're very high impact and big business. *Boardwalk* makes monument signs out of a polished styrene with a synthetic stucco exterior. They are built entirely in the shop. Then the completed monument is taken to the site

and, where there is nothing today, site entrances suddenly become well marked for everyone.

SIGNS OF SUCCESS

One of Pafoon's favorite sign projects was the St. Andrews project. St. Andrews is in an older part of Panama City which was established in 1827, but over time has suffered a collapse. It went from being a vibrant community to being completely rundown. The Downtown Improvement Board decided to restore the old villages. The marina was totally re-worked. Houses and restaurants were brought back to their original period appearance.

Having successfully completed signs for the St. Andrews restoration project, *Boardwalk* anticipates future business as new merchants move into the area. Pafoon explains, "We design the sign and it goes through the Downtown Improvement Board. They have to approve it and, of course, everything we do has to be like the golden-era, turn-of-the-century type signage. We have to mimic a lot of the sand blasted and hand carved versions. That's

been on ongoing project for us." And there's more to come.

Like the approval process of the Improvement Board, sign codes and local ordinances must also be observed.

"In Florida," reports Pafoon, "they have become very restrictive because of the historical areas that we've been working in. Florida is adopting much more stringent roadway signage and pathway signage, requiring that it meet certain specifications and durability factors and that type of thing."

Another favorite project was at Baytown Wharf, a project started in December 2002. As you walk around Baytown Wharf you will see several examples of *Boardwalk's* work: Poppy's Seafood Factory, Roberto's Pizzeria and the Magnolia & Ivy Tea Parlor which included a 3D teakettle as part of the sign.

ADVANCING IN ALL AREAS

Even with a large focus on restoration work, *Boardwalk* Signs continues to grow by incorporating new technology and new materials into its business. Utilizing

a computerized router allows the creation of 3D effects, prismatic and special effects backgrounds for signs. Pafoon praises the router's abilities, saying, "Some of our signs have over 200 pieces, which is pretty extensive. The router will route all the framing and mechanisms that hold the sign together and it's perfect as far as engineering is concerned as well as the aesthetics."

Substrate materials in the sign business have also developed over the years. *Boardwalk Signs* uses SignFoam 3 and a tremendous amount of Comatex expanded PVCs. "We're beginning to make everything out of PVC. It's very cost-effective. We found out that it has a very hardened skin which holds up well to vandalism — it almost makes it vandalism-proof. We have a process now where we can paint it any color we want, and we can make cabinets out of it for smaller electrical signs," Pafoon says.

Before the Gerber 408 router can

begin its work on any material, each sign must be individually designed. Pafoon still does the initial sketches by hand to give himself and his customers some ideas to start with. If a sketch is really on target, then he will scan it into the computer

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and continue drawing, most often using CorelDRAW 9.

Pafoon envisions *Boardwalk Signs'* future business growing in the restaurant market (complete facades and interiors); theme packages (like a seafood warehouse inside and outside signage); and building more and more dimensional signage. He would like to move into the sculpture end of it. It adds to the attrac-

tiveness of the business. Also, he foresees moving into full blown digital printing, because right now all of that is outsourced from *Boardwalk Signs*.

"I think this area here is a little bit behind, well, quite a bit behind areas like L.A. or Atlanta, so we're trying to bring some of those things here, for instance, building wraps and things like that. We'll probably not get into the large format of 40' to 50' banners because there's just not a market here for that. And all your bigger towns have pretty much sewn up that area already." It is this sense of foresight, even though *Boardwalk Signs* seems to have already found its niche, which will continue to build upon an already successful business. SB

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