

BY AMY DUNN AND CHUCK GIBSON

Clockmaking Business Thrives with Exceptional Service and Professionalism

**Blackstone Manor Clock Repair,
Hopkins, Minnesota**

Mark Purdy is very likely to meet you at your car when you pull up in front of Blackstone Manor Clock Repair. He can see you parking and opening your trunk. He knows you're coming to see him.



The quaint Blackstone Manor storefront in Hopkins, Minnesota. This shop is an easy drive from the greater Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area.

"I'll run out and try to help customers get their clock safely out of the car," says Purdy. And when customers enter, everything is visible. There is a "triage" area for

clocks with an old watchmaker's bench sitting right in front. The shop is adorned with fascinating clocks and parts. Purdy says his antique-looking countertop also draws a lot of customer attention. The interest ranges from people wondering what it is to people saying, "That's so cool!" Once in awhile some even ask to buy it. Customers may think Blackstone Manor Clock Repair is filled with old-world charm, but when their timepiece repair is finished, they find out it's been repaired with modern precision and professionalism.



Mark Purdy, CC21, is the owner of Blackstone Manor Clock Repair. They service all types of clocks, high-end mechanical watches and also everyday wristwatches.

The front showroom is filled with grandfather clocks for sale. Completed repairs are hanging on a display wall waiting to be picked up. "We try to assess the clock right away while the customer is here," says Purdy about his business process. "We give them a ballpark price—a top and a bottom—and we always allow a little room for the unexpected. Additionally, we tell the customer if it's going to cost more than we've originally discussed that we will call them before we go further. We don't spend any of our customers' money until they give us their approval."

At Blackstone Manor, there's always something disassembled and visible for the customer to see on the workbench. In order to help the customer understand and justify the expense of the repair, the staff will walk them past their processes of disassembly,

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The busy workspace at Blackstone Manor Clock Repair.

polishing, cleaning, installing bushings, and all the other work. This gives the customer a true understanding of a repair cost is and why it's worth the price. "Their clock is worth something to us, just as it is to them," Purdy adds.

Becoming a Clockmaker

Mark Purdy began learning the craft while helping his brother, Rolf, at his jewelry store. Rolf graduated from Gem City College and is a Certified Master Watchmaker (CMW). He taught Mark the fundamentals of clock repair. Mark's education continued when he found his way into Kuempel Chime Clock Works around 1990. Kuempel is located in Minneapolis. It was started in 1916 and gradually evolved into a kit company for grandfather clocks. "I begged my way in the door of that company," notes Purdy. He worked for Kuempel for a number of years before deciding to branch out on his own. He leased shop space from



Old workbench serves as the "triage" area for the shop. Customers seem fascinated by the weathered bench and some have asked to purchase it.

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Kuempel and did some work for them. Eventually, advertising helped Purdy generate his own clientele, and when Kuempel closed, Purdy was able to move to a new space in nearby Hopkins, Minnesota.

Even now, Purdy's Kuempel connection contributes to the quality workmanship at his shop. Gayle Anderson, who also worked at Kuempel, is now 80 years old and still works for Purdy part-time. At the same time, Purdy recognizes the importance of formal training and certification for himself and his staff. Purdy went through the AWCI pilot program and is a Certified Clockmaker of the 21st Century (CC21). Full-time employees Jonathan Simmons and Adam Puryear, have both graduated from watchmaker programs. "Each one eventually decided they like working on clocks better than watches, but their watch training has proven valuable," notes Purdy. Simmons graduated from the watchmaking school in St. Paul, Minnesota. Puryear, at 21 years old, is the most recent addition to Blackstone Manor's staff and is a graduate of Gem City College, School of Horology.

Promotion Helps Entire Business Community

You could say Mark Purdy's avenue to success is filled with unconventional twists. It starts with hurrying out the door to personally greet customers. It continues with his aggressive stance in marketing his business.

The storefront window display has been consistently recognized by the Hopkins Main Street business district for creativity and appeal. "A little bit of effort goes a long way with the appearance of our storefront," he comments. Blackstone Manor doesn't lure customers in by advertising "percent-off" sales that may cheapen the perception of their work; rather, they advertise that they give potential customers a \$10 gift card to a local meat shop and deli when they come to the shop.

This "partnership advertising" helps build business all around. "I'm sure my customers spend more than \$10 at the deli. And if you can give a customer an incentive to come in the door, people will often stay in the area and go to other shops. This way, we retailers spread the business around in our community," says Purdy enthusiastically.

From the start, Purdy was able to get the word out through public relations. Blackstone Manor Clock Repair received a lot of attention from an article writ-

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ten by the editor of a local antiques publication called *Old Times*. The article featured his historic home on Blackstone Avenue plus his clock repair background. Learning from this experience, Purdy began placing ads in similar local publications.

“Another area where we were fortunate was our start on Angie’s List,” he says. “That’s been very good for us. You have to earn your reputation there and continue to earn it.”

The shop was just notified that they received the Super Service award from Angie’s List.* It is the seventh time Blackstone Manor Clock Repair has been recognized for quality in service on Angie’s List.



Video Creates a Stir

When Mark Purdy moved his shop to its present location on Main Street, it quickly became the focus of a community video campaign. “We were contacted by the city of Hopkins,” Purdy explained. The city was partnering with Blue Cross & Blue Shield to produce a video demonstrating how a small town shopping district can be accessible by walking or biking. The city manager sent the film crew over to see Blackstone Manor Clock Repair and we were included in this video. Blackstone Manor often uses this video to promote themselves, especially on their website.



Blackstone Manor also repairs modern timepieces such as this 48” Mystery Swinger clock.

Purdy uses every opportunity he can to tell the community how much he loves being in Hopkins and how great it is for business. “When the film crew came in to talk to us, they were just in love with everything going on here. Now we actually have people come in because they are biking through Hopkins or walking on Main Street.” The video went well beyond

all their expectations. “It was a big hit that had more than local appeal,” Purdy comments. A customer from New Hampshire also saw the video on the internet and ultimately sent her clock to them for repair.

Another video has brought additional attention to the shop. This video was produced for a small-town internet newsletter called *Patch*. Purdy says its part of AOL and the software allows each local community to have their own “patch.com” system for promotion. Along with the Hopkins Blue Cross/Blue Shield video, two patch.com videos have been produced and can be viewed on the Blackstone Manor Clock Repair website at www.blackstonemanorclockrepair.com.

AWCI Helps Wind-Up Blackstone Manor’s Service and Professionalism

Purdy attends national AWCI conventions and uses other services of the Institute. He believes the Institute helps him further the high level of quality and service he provides to customers. “AWCI is an important trade affiliation that not only gives you credibility, it also gives you the resources and professional ground to build on,” Purdy says. “I’m also the type of business owner who takes myself seriously, and I realize that by participating in AWCI, I can add to the industry.”

Purdy ends by saying that the skills he’s developed—and the confidence he has in managing his business—can be partly attributed to the knowledge he has gained through AWCI. “It’s easy for members to learn how to improve their business,” he adds. “You can get quite a bit of information just by reading the *HT* trade magazine.”

Clockmaking is Alive and Well at Blackstone Manor

The clockmaking business is definitely thriving at Blackstone Manor. The shop already employs Gayle Anderson, Jonathan Simmons, and Adam Puryear, each with a solid education and credentials. Purdy also enthusiastically encourages others when they show an interest in clockmaking. “We have a high-school student who comes in to help out on Thursday mornings before school,” Purdy notes. A story about this student working on his father’s pocket watch at the shop also appeared on *Patch.com*.

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From delicate antique china clocks to high-end Atmos clocks, Blackstone Manor sees all types of repair challenges.

The student's initial pocket watch project (for which he, of course, needed much assistance), has developed into additional practice projects on cuckoo clock and grandmother-sized movements.

When another person in town expressed an interest in clock repair, Mark invited him to come by the shop. The man had already repaired two clocks on his own, but needed help on a third one. Purdy followed up their meeting with an e-mail message about how the industry needs to train for the future. At 51 years old, the man thought it might be too late. Again, Mark Purdy seized an opportunity to help someone grow their interest in clockmaking. This new clock repair aficionado now plans to join the Minnesota Clockmakers Guild, an AWCI Affiliate Chapter. Last, but not least, another local resident comes in on Saturdays, and Blackstone Manor is teaching him to fix clocks so that he can resell them. It seems as if an informal apprentice program has developed at Blackstone Manor Clock Repair.

Thanks to Mark Purdy and his staff, clockmaking is definitely alive and well in Hopkins, Minnesota. ♦

*Super Service Award is a trademark of Angie's List.



Jonathan Simmons (front) and Gayle Anderson (back) keep repair jobs moving steadily through the shop.

Blackstone Manor Clock Repair

815 Main St.
Hopkins, MN 55343
Telephone: 952 - 920 - 1300

www.blackstonemanorclockrepair.com