

Redwood Burl Co. one of a dying breed

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In a little unincorporated place known as Hiouchi, near the Jedediah Smith State Park, a woodcarving shop is among a dying breed.

“There’s not a lot of young people doing it,” said co-owner Lee Nylen, one of Hiouchi’s 301 residents, according to the last census count. “Crescent City used to have 10 or 12 shops, Gasquet used to have one or two, there were probably people out in Smith River, down in Klamath, just in this county.”

Now, there’s just a few sprinkled throughout the county, said Nylen. One of them being the Jed Smith Redwood Burl Co.

Inside, patrons will find hundreds of carvings of different colors, shapes, sizes and finishes, all lining the walls and strewn about the property. There are realistic renditions of seals, salmon, bears and, yes, plenty of redwood trees, most of them carved from coastal redwoods.

“You’re in the redwoods, and you want most of your novelty items to be redwood, that’s why they buy them,” said Nylen.

Although, Nylen did admit to selling other types of wood in his shop. He said burls from Manzanita trees can make handsome boxes. A burl is an unusual tree growth which causes the grain to become deformed in some way. Nylen said carvers and woodworkers often look for burl wood because it is visually interesting.

“Burl is like the diamond, that’s where the money is,” said Nylen.

In addition to wood products, they sell honey from the Chetco Gold bee farm in Brookings, as well as unfinished wood products, including slabs, often made into table or bar tops. In fact, the nearby Hiouchi Café — about 400 feet away — recently installed a new countertop made from a Jed Smith Redwood Burl Co. redwood slab.

The Jed Smith Redwood Burl Co. opened in 1979. Initially, they specialized in those unfinished products. Over time though, the owners began procuring carvings, in addition to learning how to carve themselves. Now, most of the work in the shop is their own, save a few pieces.

As one of 301 in Hiouchi, Nylén said he welcomes you to pull over next time you are traveling along U.S. Highway 199, and see a sign that simply reads, “camp firewood, honey, carvings, art.”