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ROCK SOLID

Business is on the move for Rock Jaw creator

BY JOAN O'NEILL

CHARLEVOIX - When Paul Lindberg first stepped foot into the Michigan Landscape Association trade show in Grand Rapids in January, he wasn't sure how his new product, Rock Jaw, would be accepted.

Rock Jaw was not created, after all, after months and months of market research. No surveys were conducted nor were there any focus groups telling Lindberg that such a product would be an instant hit. There wasn't even a similar product that came before it by which he could gauge his potential success.

What led Lindberg to the creation of Rock Jaw, and eventually to the landscaping trade show that cold January day, rather, was necessity—that fabulous mother of invention. And now, a mere seven months after launching the product, Lindberg is enjoying the sweet taste of success.

To the general public, Rock Jaw is exactly what it sounds like—a large jaw-like contraption that assists landscapers in moving heavy stones and rocks. To the landscape contractor and stonemason, however, it means reduced labor costs, reduced

purchased and renovated the Round Island Lighthouse on the St. Mary's River, Lindberg found himself needing to build multi-tiered stone retaining walls at the water's edge. In a previous life, Lindberg was a landscape designer and installer, giving him the knowledge and expertise to accomplish the task. What he was lacking, however, was the manpower.

Faced with moving literally thousands of rocks, Lindberg was doubtful that the current rock moving method of chaining or strapping large rocks and then raising them using a forklift would be of use for his one-man show. He felt it was unproductive and, even more so, cause for aches and pains since there was much lifting and moving by hand.

"I thought to myself, if I have to do this, I'll be here forever," he joked. "So one thing led to another, and out of self defense, I began thinking about making a product to expedite the process."

A few prototypes later, Rock Jaw was



or four months later, while showing friends just how he moved those thousand-plus rocks, Lindberg was told he should look into marketing his contraption.

"He said, 'That's ingenious! You should do something with this,'" Lindberg said of one of the individuals.

Long story short, Lindberg heeded this advice and sought the assistance of Petoskey-based Bayshore Steel to help manufacture what was beginning to seem like the next best thing for the landscape business. Together with Bayshore's Rob Wojan and Wayne Wimmer, Lindberg tweaked Rock Jaw to the point where, in September of 2004, they felt they had a product in which landscape contractors and stonemasons would be very interested.

The concept of Rock Jaw is simple, Lindberg explained. But don't let that fool you. When attached to a backhoe, skid steer, crane or any other piece of heavy equipment with lifting capacity, the bright yellow Rock Jaw has a lifting capacity of 4,500 pounds. It's 52" wide jaw span, with serrated teeth, can pick up large stones as easily as small ones. And its ability to rotate 360 degrees allows landscapers to present each rock's ideal face.

"We knew there was nothing else out there like this," Lindberg said. "Still, we needed to market it to see if there was any interest."

That's when Lindberg hired the likes of the Intelligence Agency of Traverse City who helped Lindberg and his Rock Jaw literally make landscaping history. Knowing potential clients had to see it to believe it, the first thing the Intelligence Agency created was a three-minute DVD illustrating how Rock Jaw worked.

They concurrently launched a website, rockjaw.com, planned the display for the Michigan Landscaping Association trade show, strategized on direct mail campaigns and contacted trade journals for story placement.

"The Intelligence Agency, Woody Smith in particular, has been instrumental in mar-



Jaw line: Paul Lindberg at Bayshore Steel with his invention.

injuries, increased productivity and increased efficiency. Stonework is done faster and with fewer employees, which means only good things to the bottom line.

Lindberg was not looking to invent anything when he stumbled upon the idea for Rock Jaw; he was just hoping to make his task at hand a little easier. Having recently

born, and with his new invention, which looks very much like a large steel ice tong with teeth, Lindberg was able to move and place over 1,500 rocks at the lighthouse shoreline in record time.

At that point, Lindberg was content with the fruit of his labor, and tucked the original Rock Jaw into storage. But some three

keting Rock Jaw," Lindberg was quick to point out.

And successful, too. At the trade show in mid-January, the first effort in mass marketing Rock Jaw, Lindberg and the Intelligence Agency sold every Rock Jaw they brought with them—a total of six—and took orders for an additional 20. It was a rather gratifying experience for Lindberg and the people that helped him get to that point, and an indication to him of the success that Rock Jaw would enjoy.

Since the trade show, over 180 Rock Jaws have been sold at the price tag of roughly \$1,200. Rock Jaw is now in use in almost every state in the United States, including two in use in Hawaii. One has even been shipped to Nicaragua. With a patent pending in the United States and in process in Europe in Canada, Lindberg is now working on adding to his network of distributors, working with distributors worldwide.

The best news to Lindberg, though, is when he receives phone calls from happy customers. "I had one customer call me and tell me that it used to take him 14 minutes to move one stone. Now he can move 18 stones in one hour."

Rock Jaw is based out of Charlevoix and is distributed in Michigan by Northern Boulder. For more information, call (800) 314-5582 or log onto www.rockjaw.com.