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# Hometowns

WEST RIVERSIDE



**Unfinished blades** rest on some of the ironwood board ends used for decking on the Black Bridge and salvaged for use as handles.



**Victor Hangas**, left, and his son Mark hold one of the newest knives from their West Riverside business, Ruana Knives. Their Black Bridge Green Kitchen Knife has a handle made from Brazilian ironwood left over from the decking of the refurbished Black Bridge and commemorates that famous span over the Blackfoot River.

## Slicing through time

Ruana Knives uses parts of old 'Black Bridge' in new project



**Mike, Victor** and Mark Hangas, from left, make their knives in the same shop where Victor's father-in-law, Rudy Ruana, started more than 70 years ago.

Written by KIM BRIGGEMAN  
 Photographed by TOM BAUER  
 of the Missoulian

WEST RIVERSIDE – A bridge connects, a knife divides. In a metaphoric world, the twain shall never meet.

But not here at Ruana Knives. This is the unmarked wooden shop that Rudy Ruana took over after Eino Weimer moved his auto repair garage across the flats to the Blackfoot River in 1936.

It's where Mark Hangas straightens steel on the same anvil that Ruana, his grandfather, brought from North Dakota more than 70 years ago. It's where Mark's father Victor fired up a grinder motor last week that was delivered to the Missoula Mercantile in 1945.

"This is kind of the workhorse," said Vic, 72, who went to work in

this shop for his father-in-law on Jan. 1, 1964, and bought the business when Ruana retired at age 80 in 1983.

"You've got to beat on it with a hammer once in a while to make it run," said Mark, 51, who fashions blades over a throwback forge fueled by coal. "Everything's old-fashioned here."

"Especially the owner," quipped Vic.

It's that sense of past that makes the Hangas' latest side project distinctive.

You'll find Ruana knives almost anywhere in the world these days, but this line is particularly local. The handles are made of Brazilian ironwood, chunks of which were left over last year when the 1921 vintage steel bridge at Milltown was planked

See **RUANA**, Page B2

■ **Video:** For a video from Ruana Knives in West Riverside, go to this story on **Missoulian.com**.



## Steven Sandtner was a brilliant inventor, centenarian

By **TRISTAN SCOTT**  
 of the Missoulian

Looking at old photographs of Steven J. Sandtner is a bit like time travel. There's the brilliant hair, the movie-star gorgeous wife, the retro charm of an old car.

Indeed, having lived to be 101 years old, Sandtner was something of an expert on time travel, gliding from era to distinctive era and adapting to those changing epochs.

"He lived in a time when

**WESTERN MONTANA LIVES**

Tributes to everyday Montanans

there were just so many changes going on in the world," recalls his close friend and accountant, Tana Doyle of Lolo. "He knew people who fought in the Civil War. In his lifetime, he went from horse and buggy to jetliners. Think of everything he saw. He grew up in an exciting time."

But he was never an anachronism. As a professional chemist and

inventor, the centenarian left behind a discreet signature on the pages of history and helped influence the times as they changed around him.

In the 1930s, prompted by a few Boy Scouts who complained about their limited backcountry dessert options, Sandtner started fooling around in his laboratory and developed a formula for "the 25-second instant dessert," which later

became Jell-O instant pudding.

He owned and operated Sandtner and Valentine Laboratory in Washington state, and under a contract with the U.S. Department of Defense he created a cooling solution for nuclear reactors. He also crafted a formula to remove barnacles from ferries and designed an artificial bait for crab fishermen (the invention was a flop because it turned the crabmeat pink).

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**Steven J. Sandtner**

## FROM PAGE B1

### Ruana

#### Continued

during a massive rehabilitation project.

"We're just kind of referring to it as the Black Bridge Green Kitchen Knife," said Mike Hargas, Vic's youngest son and Ruana Knives' business manager.

It's "Black Bridge" because that's how the locals have long referred to the steel former state highway bridge that was made a pedestrian-only span in the 1970s.

It's green, Mike explained, because "we figured it would be a good way to use up all those smaller pieces and keep them out of the landfill."

And "kitchen knife," said Vic, because Ruana's kitchen knives have solid wood handles and its hunting knives do not. Still, no one is likely to butter toast with this one.

**The project is still** in its infant stages. Fewer than 10 Black Bridge knives have been finished so far,

and those mostly for friends and family. Some have names etched into their handles.

"You can pass it down (through the family) forever if you want," Mike Hargas said.

He recently obtained an architectural rendering of the new old bridge from Brad Miller of HDR Engineering, who engineered the bridge project. Hargas plans to soon provide customers the option of a knife with the bridge's silhouette engraved by laser on the blade, completing the connection of two community treasures – its oldest public bridge and one of its oldest continuous businesses.

The idea for the custom knife started percolating last fall when a neighbor, Mike Devlin, mentioned the wood to the Hargas clan.

"Basically the scraps from the decking were piled up on the road down by the bridge and people were scavenging it," Mike Hargas said.

Then Paul Layton, a Piltzville artist, dropped by

*"It's not as pretty as some wood. But it's solid, and it'll last forever. Kind of like us in our business."*

**– Mike Hargas, Ruana Knives' business manager, on the ironwood used in the Black Bridge Green Kitchen Knife project**

on his four-wheeler.

"I do so many of those different kinds of artwork and what have you, and when I saw those pieces of ironwood, one of the first things I thought about were knife handles, and I thought about those guys," Layton said.

He asked the bridge foreman if he could take some. Help yourself, he was told, and soon enough Layton was buzzing off to the knife shop on nearby West Riverside Drive, a pile of Brazilian ironwood as a payload.

Before long, again with the bridge foreman's approval, the Hargas had a stack of the dense, hard wood in storage, a stash large enough to make ironwood-handled Ruana knives for years to come.

"It'll probably last longer than we will," noted Mike, who's 45.

Layton was a major push in a "Save Our Bridge" campaign, when the historic bridge's fate was being bandied about a couple of years ago. Such local pressure prompted Missoula County engineer Tim Elsea to devise an innovative "hybrid" design, creating a single-truss bridge that maintained the look and feel of the old span.

Part of Elsea's solution was to reduce the weight of the bridge by replacing the heavy concrete deck with wood. Ironwood was the planking of choice, and the Hargas men know why.

"We use it, too, because it'll last forever," said Vic. "But it's pretty spendy."

It's a project close to Hargas hearts. Ilona Hargas, Vic's wife and Ruana's daughter, grew up in a house two blocks away. "She walked that bridge

every day, twice a day, going to school in Bonner," Vic said.

Her brother, Rudy Jr., became an NCAA champion skier at the University of Montana, but only after surviving a near-death experience on the bridge.

This was back in the day when it was the only traffic bridge across the Blackfoot River.

As Vic tells it, "Pinky" Ruana was riding his bike across it one day and caught the handlebars in a girder.

"It threw him off his bike, he lit out on the road, and a logging truck drove over the top of him," he said.

Ilona was on her way home from school and heard the news from the postmaster: Her brother had just been run over by a logging truck. Fortunately, the impact of the spill knocked the boy cold.

"If he'd raised his head up it probably would have killed him," said Vic. "The logging truck drove right over the top without doing a thing."

For years before and after the bridge was

blocked to traffic, it was a summer gathering place for boys and girls. Many dived from the deck into the river/reservoir below. A few dared to jump from the very top, the equivalent of a four-story plunge.

"I did that a couple of times," admitted Mark Hargas. "The scary part was climbing up there. That was a lot worse than the jump to me."

There's no such jumping any more. Removal of the Milltown Dam in 2008 drained the reservoir that backed up into the Blackfoot. But the Black Bridge, in its modern form, remains and should for years to come. So, too, the Black Bridge knives, with handles of the reddish brown ironwood.

"It's not as pretty as some woods," Mike Hargas said. "But it's solid, and it'll last forever. Kind of like us in our business."

Reporter Kim Briggeman can be reached at 523-5266 or at [kbriggeman@missoulian.com](mailto:kbriggeman@missoulian.com).

### Sandtner

#### Continued

Sandtner also designed his own line of cosmetics called "Smoothie," which he invented for his wife.

"I remember going into his lab and testing perfume samples," said Sandtner's granddaughter, Renee Gaylor of Florida. "He had all of these cosmetics, and Smoothie was one of them. I can still smell it. To this day I can still imagine the scent. It was just a very silky, smooth skin moisturizer, but it smelled amazing."

Sandtner was inspired to launch the Smoothie product line after creating a heavy-duty lotion for his employees' hands, which were often raw and chapped from working with harsh chemicals. His wife used the lotion and when her friends commented on her soft skin, she shared it with them.

"Well, it became so popular that they marketed it and I wouldn't be surprised if the formula is used in lotions today," Doyle said. "He even made his own toothpaste."

When Sandtner died

earlier this year in Missoula, he'd outlived most of his family members, including his beloved wife of 60 years, Sallee. Doyle said Sandtner spoke of their long marriage with the adulation of a young honeymooner. When he died on Feb. 6, it was on her birthday.

"They had an incredible love. They loved each other so much," Doyle said. "When she was diagnosed with cancer, he bought an RV and they traveled all around the country. He took care of her."

**Born in Chicago,** Sandtner spent most of his professional life in Washington before moving to Montana to retire.

His mother was Hungarian royalty and his father met her while entertaining her family – he was an equestrian trick rider.

In Chicago, Sandtner grew up across the street from Al Capone, but he chose a more virtuous path, perhaps because his father told him to "stay away from those thugs," Doyle said. Instead of running errands for Capone, Sandtner honed his work ethic

delivering milk for 50 cents a day, and even felt guilty when a competing milkman offered to double his wages.

That strong work ethic never diminished, and Sandtner published his final paper in 2007. Published by the Department of Agriculture, the paper was titled "Hydrogen Peroxide as a soil amendment for Greenhouse Nasturtium Production." The paper suggested the benefits of adding hydrogen peroxide to eliminate bacteria and oxygenate soil. He was 100 years old.

"He had all of his wits

about him," Doyle said. "He was very aware of everything. I was with him when he died, and I was really upset. I was in denial. I didn't want him to go. I kept imagining him living for years and years. He'd say, 'Don't worry, I'll see you again!'"

"He changed my entire family's life. He's such an incredible man you just think, gosh, it's amazing that there are people like this."

Reporter Tristan Scott can be reached at 523-5264 or at [tscott@missoulian.com](mailto:tscott@missoulian.com).

## HOMETOWNS

# Quality Supply to hold food drive Thursday

By **TANDY KHAMENEH** of the Missoulian

Quality Supply, 2801 W. Broadway, will hold a food drive to benefit the Missoula Food Bank. Bring nonperishable food items to Quality Supply on Thursday and Quality Supply will deliver the items to the Missoula Food Bank. Anyone who donates food will also receive 10 percent off regularly priced items at Quality Supply on Thursday. For more information, call 549-2355.

**Puddin's Place** at 800 Kensington in the South Suburban Plaza invites you to participate in our Winter Coats For Needy Kids Campaign. Donate a clean used coat in good condition that your child has outgrown and receive a coat that will fit at no cost. Or donate a coat and receive 10 percent off your

total purchase. You do not have to donate a coat in order to receive one, but all donations are welcome.

**Great Old Broads for Wilderness** is hosting its fifth annual Wild for Wilderness online auction. Bidding runs through the evening of Sunday, Nov. 15. Hundreds of items are on the block, including adventure trips, outdoor gear, clothes, jewelry, artwork, fine art photography, books, and vacation stays from Virginia City to Moab and from Normandy to San Francisco. Find the auction at [auction.greatoldbroads.org](http://auction.greatoldbroads.org).

Great Old Broads for Wilderness is a national nonprofit that uses the voices and activism of elders to preserve and protect wilderness and wild lands. The local contact with the Western Montana Broadband (the

local chapter) is Liz Rantz. She can be reached at [westernlass@aol.com](mailto:westernlass@aol.com). All proceeds from the auction benefit Broads' wilderness and wild land advocacy. Visit Broads at [www.greatoldbroads.org](http://www.greatoldbroads.org).

**The American Legion Auxiliary**, Fort Owen Post 94, is collecting items to send care packages to local service personnel currently overseas. It is also updating its list of APO and FPO addresses. Items and addresses may be left with Margi at Valley Drug on Main Street in Stevensville by Nov. 5. A list of needed items is available at Valley Drug.

Over the last few months, the **Rotary Club of Missoula** has

#### NONPROFIT

Community roundup

presented Paul Harris Fellowship awards to 14 Missoulians, 10 of them non-Rotarians, for significant contributions to their community.

Paul Harris Fellowships were established by the Rotary Foundation to recognize those who contribute to the advancement of Rotary programs. The foundation sponsors projects worldwide providing educational, humanitarian and other assistance.

Projects sponsored by the Rotary Club of Missoula and funded through the Rotary Foundation include providing furnishings for the local Ronald McDonald house, equipment for Splash Montana, assistance for Missoula Medical Aid in Central

America, and appliances for the new Watson Children's Center building.

The following were honored for outstanding contributions to young people of Missoula or Montana and the enrichment of the community exemplifying the Rotary motto of service above self: Non-Rotarians – Marti Leibenguth, girls basketball coach at Big Sky High School; community benefactor Susan A. Talbot and her husband, John, a Rotarian; Lady Griz basketball coach Robin Selvig; Marilyn Marler, weed specialist in the University of Montana Division of Biological Sciences; Barry Olson of the Ronald McDonald House; Dave Chrismon of Missoula Habitat for Humanity; UM golf coach Joanne Steele; director James Caron of the Missoula Children's Theatre; longtime speech

coach Matthew Stergios of Loyola-Sacred Heart High School, and District Judge John W. Larson.

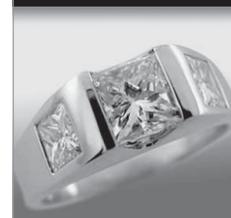
Other Rotarians honored were Jack Chambers of Opportunity Resources; Kathy Ogren of Bitterroot Motors; and Geoff Birnbaum, Missoula youth soccer coach.

**noon's**

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#### IN THE SERVICE

News from the military

#### Air Force

**Air National Guard Airman Daniel P. Snyder** and **Airman Kelcie M. O'Connor** graduated from basic military training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio. Snyder is the son of Lisa and stepson of Shawn Keele of Hamilton.

O'Connor is the daughter of Patrick O'Connor of Missoula and is a 2009 graduate of Frenchtown High School.

#### Army

**Reserve Sgt. James P. Umland** has completed the Warrior Transition Course at Fort Sill in

Lawton, Okla. Umland is the son of Michael Umland of Philipsburg and Laura Metzger of Acworth, Ga.

**John P. Harrison** graduated from the Army ROTC Leader's Training Course at Fort Knox, Ky. Harrison is the son of R. Harrison of Missoula and is a 2000 graduate of

Hellgate High School. The cadet is a student at Montana State University, Bozeman.

**Joshua A. Wallace** graduated from the Army ROTC Leader Development and Assessment Course, also known as Operation Warrior Forge, at Fort

Lewis in Tacoma, Wash. Wallace is the son of Lonnie and Toni Wallace of Florence and is a 2006 graduate of Florence-Carlton High School. He is a student at the University of Montana.

#### WE CARE

Helping people in need

## Assisted-living center in need of refrigerator

By **TANDY KHAMENEH** of the Missoulian

The Missoula Health and Rehabilitation Center, (a nursing and assisted-living center) is in need of a refrigerator. It does not need to have a freezer. If

you can help, please call Mischelle, business manager, 549-0988.

■ The Darby Bread Box, a local food bank in Darby, will be opening Jan 4. During November and December, organizers are

collecting canned fruit and vegetables and also peanut butter. Drop off donations are at People's Market or Bitterroot Community Credit Union. Any kind of donation would be appreciated.

*The Missoulian features the We Care column every Monday. If you are a nonprofit agency with a client or family with needs, please call Tandy Khameneh at 523-5205, or at [tandyk@missoulian.com](mailto:tandyk@missoulian.com).*

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