

BUSINESS

Local design worker honored

The Medal of Honor, Service Cross, Bronze Star and Purple Heart are among the famed medals members of the U.S. armed forces receive for distinguished service in the line of duty. But receiving a special military honor for outstanding service in a traditional line of work, like remodeling, is out of the ordinary. It occurred recently to an employee of Centerville-based Remodeling Designs for his work in the home of a retired Air Force general living in Beavercreek.

Last January, Beavercreek residents Ed and Jerri Mechenbier contracted with Remodeling Designs to update their kitchen. The work led to remodeling the front entry and ultimately the master bathroom. The Mechenbier's fascinating story gradually came to light during the project.

Ed and Jerri are from the Dayton area. They met in 1959 during their junior year in high school, dated and fell in love. But Ed headed west after graduation, having been accepted by the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. During Ed's third year at the Academy he proposed to Jerri and she accepted. They married three weeks after Ed's graduation. The year was 1964 and the Vietnam War was escalating. Ed was rushed to pilot training in Oklahoma, then on to fighter training in Arizona. Meanwhile, Jerri was adjusting to life as an Air Force wife. The couple's next move was to England on assignment. Shortly thereafter Ed's squadron received orders for Vietnam. In December, 1966, Ed arrived in Southeast Asia.

Six months later, during Ed's 80th mission over North Vietnam, and 20 missions shy of the required 100, his F-4 Phantom jet was shot down. Captured immediately, Ed spent almost 6 torturous years as a POW in Hanoi. The years were torturous for Jerri also, who held onto shreds of hope based on scant information finding its way out of Hanoi. Ed was released on February 21, 1973.

Returning to the States,



Submitted photo

Pictured is Brian Good (center) accepting the award from Ed Mechenbier. On the far left is Jerri Mechenbier. Remodeling Designs president, Erich Eggers.

Captain Mechenbier joined the test wing at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, followed by duties with the Ohio Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve. In June, 2004, Major General Mechenbier retired after 44 years in uniform. At the time of his retirement, Ed had the distinction of being the last Vietnam-era POW still serving the country. His final military flight before retiring was piloting an Air Force C-141 dubbed the "Hanoi Taxi" from Vietnam to Hawaii with the remains of two American servicemen aboard. It was the same plane that airlifted POWs home in 1973.

Brian Good, a Remodeling Designs' employee for almost 8 years, served as project manager throughout the Mechenbier's remodeling project, which started in the kitchen but didn't remain there! As Ed cheerfully puts it, "The sink is connected to the countertop, the countertop is connected to the back splash, and the back splash to the wall, the wall to the floor, the floor to the hallway..." Their 'kitchen project' evolved to include new flooring in the hall and front entry, remodeling the half bath off the entry, fol-

lowed by a complete renovation of the master bath upstairs.

The project grew because of Brian's skill, his rapport with the Mechenbiers, and the support provided by the Remodeling Designs staff. "We saw Brian's handiwork and he's a jack and master of all trades. We trusted him in our house," states Ed. Jerri liked the way Brian communicated.

"When he said he was going to be there, he was there," she recalls. So as a welcome member of the household, Brian gladly took on additional responsibilities. In fact, some days Brian watched over the family dog and let it out when necessary.

The Mechenbier's remodeling project ultimately became a greater source of joy than they ever thought possible. Brian would soon learn the full measure of Ed and Jerri's joy. The couple called Remodeling Designs to arrange a meeting with Brian and staff members.

The meeting was actually a presentation ceremony involving a very special thank you...an acrylic flame trophy awarded to Brian which reads:

Brian Good

Jack and Master of All Trades Thank You Ed and Jerri Mechenbier

Mounted in the acrylic is an item even more poignant: One of Ed's commemorative medallions created by his Air Force command and presented to Major General Mechenbier upon his retirement. Inscribed on one side of the custom-made coin are Ed's name and rank and the years of his service (1960 - 2004). On the coin's reverse side the POW / MIA flag is depicted to honor the years he spent as a North Vietnamese prisoner.

As Ed explains the gesture, "Jerri and I wanted to say thanks with more than a pat on the back." During the presentation ceremony, Ed and Jerri credited the entire Remodeling Designs team for the success of their projects. They said that Brian's name is on the trophy, but the entire company is to be thanked. What does Brian think of the Mechenbier's thoughtfulness? With excitement still in his voice he says, "I'm extremely flattered and glad I made them happy! For them to recognize my hard work makes me feel great."