

Cow Chip Creations



Amanda Njos creates one-of-a-kind furniture inside the historic barn on the family ranch. Read more about Cow Chip Creations inside.

PHOTOS BY LUANN DART

Slope Electric Cooperative Inc.

OUTLOOK

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Cow Chip Creations

Rural Bowman business creates unique furniture

BY LUANN DART

As Amanda Njos studied the 100-year-old dilapidated barn, sharing her vision with her father, he had three words: “Light a match.”

She didn’t light a match. Instead, a fire was ignited within her to determinedly restore the barn to house her business, Cow Chip Creations, served by Slope Electric Cooperative in rural Bowman.

Today, the red A-frame barn coaxes visitors off the beaten path. Under the gleaming copper roof, the barn brims with Amanda’s vision - rustic furniture handbuilt from weathered wood, revived retro pieces and imaginative decor tucked here and there.

Amanda launched Cow Chip Creations 13 years ago, starting with handpainted barn wood signs. About three years later, she discovered an old table in a barn and brought it home.

“I was looking at it and I thought, “That can’t be that hard to build,”” she says. Working in a garage, she built some tables out of old siding.

“I started playing around and building different things,” she says. Then, she covered a table that wasn’t entirely flat with foam, and her padded benches were born, carrying her signature of weathered wood, leather and rivets.

“Sometimes, your mistakes turn into your most popular items,” she says with a laugh.

The business soon outgrew a granary Amanda and her husband, Chad, had

redone as a showroom.

So, about six years ago, Amanda was standing in front of the family barn with that vision for a new showroom, a project which took 2.5 years to complete.

“It was in desperate need of repair. I had to turn it into furniture or we had to do something with it,” she says. “We always talked about how cool it would be to have my business in a barn, since I used old barn wood to build furniture.”

The barn had housed both chickens and cattle, and actually leaned a bit in the back corner. A talented contractor coaxed the building back to square and level, and the family used as much of the old materials as possible to renovate the barn

“We tried to reuse everything in here that we could,” Amanda says. The walls on the main floor are recycled barn wood, siding from the outside is now on the ceiling upstairs, along with old tin, and the upstairs walls were finished with the hayloft flooring. The former hay rail is now the handrail to the upstairs loft.

“We tried to bring all the original character back into the building that

was here. It just didn’t feel right to bring in a bunch of new materials,” Amanda says.

With the barn complete, Amanda now has a showroom, workroom and family space under one roof.

“My whole goal when I started was to be able to stay home and do custom work and not travel as much,” she says. “Home” is the family ranch southwest of Bowman, where Amanda and Chad have a black Angus cow/calf operation, and four children, ranging in ages from 3 to 16. Amanda’s business name reflects the ranch name, Cow Chip Ranch, which Chad named when he bought the ranch while still in college, partly paying tribute to his dog, “Chip.”

Amanda has been nimble with her business, not only building furniture for resale, but taking custom orders for clients to build everything from modern to rustic pieces.

“I try to work with people’s styles and do what they want. I’m not just western furniture,” she says. “I see potential in a lot of stuff. I like making unique pieces that not everybody has, and working with people to build pieces that will work for their space.”

She revives both raw materials and

Clockwise, starting at top left: 1. The barn’s hayloft has been converted into an intimate space for gatherings and craft classes. 2. Amanda Njos repurposes old wood to create new pieces. 3. The work of other artists is also available at Cow Chip Creations, including photography. 4. A handrail leading to the loft is a repurposed hay rail from the barn. 5. Amanda’s signature tables are made from wood, leather and rivets. 6. Furniture, such as the couches, is for rent for weddings or photo sessions. 7. Pottery from a local artist and other decor are tucked within the barn’s showroom.



furniture, tearing down buildings or cleaning up property, then reusing the materials.

“This stuff has been around forever and it’s fallen in, but that doesn’t mean it’s not still good wood and still can’t be used for something. You just have to reimagine it, and I’ve always been artistic,” she says.

Tourists from Pennsylvania, Florida and Arizona have found her off the beaten path to stop at the barn, discovering treasures tucked in every corner.

“People are looking for unique things,” she says. Tucked among her own creations are those of area artists, ranging from pottery to photography to leatherwork and candles.

“I’m always looking for other artists,” Amanda says.

Amanda also rescues old furniture, giving it new life.

“It’s fun to see where you can take those pieces,” she says. “Some things will speak to me.”

She describes a step stool which had been setting in her workshop for two months, when one day she decided to tackle the project.

“It’s so funny how some projects will talk to me, like ‘This needs to get done now,’” she says. “It was a disaster. Most people would have just thrown it away.”

She cleaned the stool, painted it and added some fun fabric to the seat and back. It was posted on Instagram and sold the same day. Then, more people with similar stools called her to redo theirs.

“I think people don’t see the potential in some of these things,” she says.

She has also retouched Grandpa’s old rocking chair or Grandma’s vanity.

“Just to have the story there and the history behind it, those are my favorite projects to do is when there’s a history to the piece,” she says. “My favorite part is working with pieces that have history. That was the whole beginning of my business.”

Continuing to be nimble, Amanda also rents the loft space of the barn for intimate gatherings, with seating for about 50 people. The space includes a kitchen and seating under a soaring roof.

There, Amanda also offers crafting classes on everything from chalk creations to creating leather earrings.

“I encourage people to contact me if there’s something they want to do,” Amanda says. Bringing their own food and drinks, groups have rented the space for family celebrations, bachelorette parties or a girls night out.

Amanda also offers rental



Left: Amanda Njos’ padded benches are a popular item at Cow Chip Creations. **Right:** Chalk art pieces brighten the showroom.



The 100-year-old barn was in rough condition before Amanda and Chad Njos decided to renovate it as the showroom and workspace for Cow Chip Creations.



Today, the barn beckons visitors with its gleaming copper roof. Located southwest of Bowman, Cow Chip Creations pulls tourists off the highway.

decorations for weddings or will decorate for weddings, with linens, glassware, lights and candles available, along with larger backdrop pieces. Or she will rent furniture for photo shoots for senior or engagement photos.

“I try not to put myself in a box, because you never know what people are going to want,” she says.

Prioritizing her time between family, the ranch and her business is the biggest challenge for Amanda, but she hopes to be a role model to her children.

“For them to see you working on your business,” she says. “I wanted to be building that business and I wanted my kids to see that. If you’re passionate about something, you work at it. It’s something you keep moving forward on.” ■

To learn more:
Cow Chip Creations
www.cow-chip.com
701-523-8257



Slope Electric Cooperative shares drought resources

N.D. Department of Agriculture
www.nd.gov/ndda/drought-resources

This site includes a hay map, with listings of those selling hay, buying hay and hay haulers.

North Dakota’s farmers and ranchers who have sold, or are considering selling, livestock because of drought face the prospect of a higher income tax bill due to the unplanned sales. Special federal income tax rules are available to producers who find it necessary to sell more livestock than they normally would because of drought. This site includes more information on drought-related disaster designations and tax implications for producers.

The site also lists information from other agencies.

North Dakota State University Extension
www.ag.ndsu.edu/publications/disasters/north-dakota-livestock-drought-resources

On this site is information on a variety of drought-related topics, including livestock and crop production; lawns, gardens and trees; farm/family stress; and archives of drought webinars.

This site also includes links to other resources.

N.D. Water Commission
www.swc.nd.gov/project-development/drought_disaster_livestock.html

This site includes information on the Drought Disaster Livestock Water Supply Project Assistance Program, including an online application.

North Dakota Response
<https://ndresponse.gov/2018-archive-0/drought-resources>

Here, find the latest news from the state of North Dakota regarding the drought.

Bank of North Dakota
<https://bnd.nd.gov>

The N.D. Industrial Commission has approved two Bank of North Dakota loan programs to help livestock producers cover their expenses during this year’s drought.

One is the Livestock Drought Loan Program, which is good for purchasing feed, transporting feed or livestock, obtaining water and other costs.

The second is the Livestock Rebuilder Loan Program, which is for post-drought relief and can help ranchers who have had to sell off cattle for lack of feed. ■



PHOTO BY BRAD QUENETTE

Slope Electric Cooperative is not facing a supply shortage due to ordering most of its materials last fall.

Co-op working through global shortages

BY LUANN DART

Plan ahead. Practice patience with your local businesses. And expect to pay more. A global pandemic is translating into a global shortage of certain supplies and a parallel increase in prices. Some area businesses are feeling the pinch, while others are not.

“I think we’re still feeling some of the shockwave from the pandemic. Some businesses had to close down, like our manufacturers across the country and across the world, to deal with the pandemic, so that’s going to create some shortages there, but also shipping containers are an issue,” said Matt Gardner, director of government affairs with the Greater North Dakota Chamber.

“The business model for the country pre-pandemic, it was definitely a global marketplace and everybody was getting everything from everywhere, so it adds a little bit of a challenge when we’re all dealing with a global pandemic and workforce challenges and material shortages,” he said. “It’s an entire disruption of the entire supply chain from many different angles.”

From computer chips to chicken are in scarce supply. Drinking straws and guitars. Copper. Ammunition. All difficult to obtain.

The local electric cooperatives may be unscathed, as supplies are already ordered for the summer construction season, said Slope Electric Cooperative

Co-General Manager/CEO Donald Franklund. The computer chip shortfall may be the only impact, he said.

“As far as the individual members at Slope Electric Cooperative, they’re not going to see any impact from it. It just causes us to change our scheduling,” he said. The Rural Electric Supply Cooperative, which supplies electric cooperatives in the Upper Midwest, is predicting a 5 to 6 percent inflation in the pricing of equipment due to lower supply, he said.

“When we blend that into our overall operations, it’s not even going to be a blip,” Franklund said. “One year is not going to move the needle.” ■



YOU HAVE THE POWER TO SAVE!

A home energy assessment can help stop wasted energy, too. Little bits of energy waste add up, so make sure all the systems in your home are working at peak efficiency:

- Set your water heater temperature at 120 degrees, which is hot enough for comfortable showers without wasting energy.
- Energy-efficient LED lighting uses less energy and lasts longer than conventional incandescent bulbs.
- Use a programmable thermostat to set home temperatures forward or back while you're asleep or away to save up to 10% on your heating and cooling costs.
- Electronics continue to use energy even when they're fully charged or turned off. Use advanced power strips to stop these vampire loads from feasting on your electricity.
- Seal cracks and gaps around your home with caulk or expanding foam. This acts as a windbreaker for your home, helping the insulation work up to its full potential.
- Ductwork exposed in unconditioned spaces, like attics, should also be air-sealed and insulated. This will keep you from heating and cooling the great outdoors. ■

Report from THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Regular meeting held at New England headquarters

JULY 29, 2021

- Approved the agenda with additions
- Approved minutes of the June 21 board meeting
- Approved five capital credit estate retirements
- Heard co-general managers/CEOs updates
- Reviewed West Dakota Utility Services/3C Construction update
- Approved 2022 board meeting dates
- Approved a rate transition plan in the GS1A/ GS2A class to be implemented Oct. 1, 2021, with a \$1 base charge increase and an increase from 10.3 cent per kilowatt-hour to 10.5 cents per kilowatt-hour.
- Heard board member reports
- Set a date and location for the 2022 annual meeting
- Heard department reports
- Heard legal counsel report
- Heard information technology report
- Held voucher review
- Scheduled the next board meeting for Aug. 26
- Held executive session
- Adjourned



Don't aim at electrical equipment!

As various North Dakota hunting seasons approach, please remember that electrical insulators, conductors and electrical equipment are NOT on the hunting list.

Slope Electric Cooperative encourages hunters to be aware of electrical equipment while enjoying the great outdoors this season.

Hunters and other gun owners should not shoot near or toward power lines, power poles and substations. A stray bullet can cause damage to equipment, could be deadly to the shooter, and potentially interrupt electric service to large areas.

Be aware of what's behind that big buck or it might cost big bucks. Repairs can be costly and damages cause outages to our members. As a nonprofit cooperative, owned by the members, we all share in this expense.

We encourage experienced hunters who are familiar with the area to identify the locations of utility properties and equipment to young or new hunters in their group and remind them to avoid shooting toward these facilities. Enjoy the great outdoors. Just be sure to hunt only what's in season.

Hunting safety tips:

- Do not shoot at or near power lines or insulators.
- Familiarize yourself with the location of power lines and equipment on land where you shoot.
- Take notice of warning signs and keep clear of electrical equipment.
- Do not place deer stands on utility poles or climb poles. Energized lines and equipment on the poles can conduct electricity to anyone who comes in contact with them, causing shock or electrocution.
- Do not shoot at, or near, birds perching on utility lines. That goes for any type of firearm, including pistols, rifles or shotguns.
- Do not place decoys on utility equipment. Anything attached to a pole besides utility equipment can pose an obstruction – and a serious hazard – to electric cooperative employees as they perform utility operations. ■



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