



Foam Work

Lake Elsinore businessman follows hard-knocks trail



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By **KIMBERLY PIERCEALL**
The Press-Enterprise

Underneath the Hulk is an unassuming scientist named Bruce Banner. Underneath Mark Harrington's Hulk, hoisted to the top of his Storyland Studios roof in Lake Elsinore, is 80 pounds of structural polyurethane foam.

Using clay, fiberglass, resin, metal veneer and more often than not material from an immense wall of expanded polystyrene (commonly Styrofoam) inside the company's Lake Elsinore factory, Harrington and his team have spent about two decades creating. They've crafted sculptures, wine displays, flourishes for Las Vegas hotels and an entire international space station for a Fry's Electronics outside Houston, Texas.

The cloned bighorn sheep statues that dot the Coachella Valley got their start at Storyland Studios; so did the 240 Hulk statues that have started appearing in theaters touting the upcoming Incredible Hulk feature that debuts June 13.

Q: How did you get into fabricating elements like this?

A: It's been an evolution of things. It's been an evolution of not knowing when to say no to a job because you know, why do any of us work? We work because we want to pay the bills and something comes along. 'Can you do that?' Well gosh, I'm not sure if we can or not but we'll give it a shot and we think we can do it

We were actually plastering contractors and we were doing a lot of tract housing in the area when this place was booming and we had some commercial strip centers going. We starting seeing a lot of (foam) shapes start to show up on the buildings ... at that time we had probably 35, 40 employees, and when the economy took a big downturn we slowed down with it and just kept the foam business going itself and kind of got out of the plastering business.

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David Bauman / The Press-Enterprise

Mark Harrington, president of Storyland Studios, stands on the roof of his Lake Elsinore-based company with a Hulk statue produced for an upcoming movie promotion. He has worked out of Lake Elsinore for 30 years and is an avid motocross fan.

Q: What's your educational background? Did you start as an artist?

A:
No, my educational background is the University of H.K. which is the university of hard knocks. Unfortunately, I'm enrolled in that school still, from which I will not graduate until I breathe my last breath. At that point in time, I'll feel like I've graduated.

Q: What's been such a hard knock?

A:
Things are not always as they appear. I think that's true of any business owner, the perceived thing from the rest of the world, and outsiders and employees and everybody is that you're hauling bags of money out the back door. And it's never as they appear, because you've got huge mortgages and insurances and all the issues you've got to deal with.

Story continues below



Courtesy of Storyland Studios

A nearly scale model of the International Space Station that was produced by Storyland Studios is on display in a Fry's Electronics store located near Houston.

Q: What about the Inland Empire suits your company?

A:

I've been in Lake Elsinore for 30 years and I'm an avid motocross fan, so I frequent the local tracks on a regular basis and I hope to be doing that when I'm 70 years old still. That's really my passion. I do this so I can go ride my dirt bike ... It's nice. In our business we can truly do a lot of outdoor work almost 365 days a year, maybe 355 days a year

There's a few competitors throughout the country but they're on the East Coast and so they're spending thousands of dollars every winter trying to keep the building warm enough so that employees don't freeze. Our biggest dilemma is it's awful hot here in the summer.

Q: How glad are you to be out of the housing business?

A:

Well at this point in time I'd probably be happy to say I'm glad to be out of it. But when it was booming here, two years ago, I would look at it and go, 'man those guys are making a killing what they're doing out there.' I suppose it's all relative to what's going on. There's no such thing as a golden egg out there.

Q:

Is there any particular piece that you've done that you hope does last, that years from now you can say 'hey, that's still out there, it still exists' and it's one of those pieces that you're most proud of?

A: Probably only whatever the words may be on my epitaph.

Q: Hopefully you won't be crafting your tombstone out of foam

A: That's not a bad idea ... My hope's not set in the things of this world. It's all temporary.

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Mark Harrington

Title: President

Age: 51

Company: Storyland Studios

Type of Industry: Manufacturing

Annual revenue: \$3 million

Location: Lake Elsinore

Employees: 18

Education: Tustin High School
