

# Natural Stoneworks

*Pictured (l-r):  
Mary Senft  
and Don Senft,  
owners; Ken  
Morris, operations  
manager; and  
Linda Valentino,  
design/sales.*



**Natural Stoneworks** owner Don Senft, Jr. is proud of the staff break room.

"This was a showroom!" he says as he conducts a tour of the 16,500-square-foot facility. He then points to the break room's stone-topped table and counter. "These are example granite tops and this was the small slats of wall tile they offered."

It may seem an odd thing to beam about, especially when customers don't even see it. But, to Don – a former Marine drill instructor with 20 years of service – it's an example of his leadership style. "A lot of my career translates into what I do on a daily basis here," he comments. "As a Marine, it's mission accomplishment and troop welfare. Here, it's getting the job done and taking care of the employees."

Don also is proud of the expertise of his employees, most of whom he knew from Banta Tile & Marble, where he was the fabrication shop manager and residential estimator. Ironically, one of those employees was his boss: Banta president Ken Morris, who now serves as Natural Stoneworks' operations manager. In fact, it was Ken – who also lives two houses apart from Don – who introduced the former Marine to the world of granite and marble in 2006, when Don decided to enter civilian life.

"Right before I retired, Ken had a position that opened up and invited me in for an interview," Don says. His Marine-honed determination and leadership skills won him the job, and he soon fell in love with the business. Ken jokes, "Once he got stone in the blood, he couldn't get it out!"

So much so that when Banta closed in December, Don set out to purchase the company's assets – which, as he soon discovered, was not feasible. "We started looking at the overhead and it wasn't a sound business decision," he says.

But, Don soon received a fortuitous phone call from Jamie Hess, then-owner of Natural Stoneworks. "Jamie Hess knew what I was trying to do and reached out and asked if I wanted to purchase the company," Don says.

"It was a no-brainer," Don and his wife, Mary, both say of the plunge they took. Don immediately was impressed with the setup, which included advantages such as an indoor slab yard and a fully connected facility, which allows Don, Ken and the rest of the showroom staff to relay information to the fabrication/installation team without delay. "Just from a communication standpoint, it's so much more convenient," Ken says.

"I was very excited – but let's be honest, I was nervous!" Mary admits of purchasing Natural Stoneworks. "It's a very big leap, in this economy especially, but I really, truly believed that

it was going to be perfect." Part of the reason was the team Don put together. "I didn't have a doubt in the craftsmen," she says, noting that sons Nicholas and Matthew also have pitched in part-time at the business. "It's a great team. It really is. I love coming in here."

Mary, who still works for the Transportation Safety Administration at Harrisburg International Airport, handles the company's marketing and advertising, and also is fulfilling a lifelong dream by learning the design end of the business. "I've always had a fond appreciation of designing," she says. "It's like full circle for me." She joins Natural Stoneworks' two design/sales staff members, Trisha Waybright and Linda Valentino – a 20-year vet of the granite and tile business, including several years at Tileology. "We would send people to this company to get the granite," Linda says.



*The showroom features a variety of tile and stone materials, including this very popular soapstone sink.*

Today, customers can select from hundreds of granite, stone and tile slabs in a variety of colors and finishes. One particularly popular option is soapstone. "If you have that old, Lancaster County farmhouse and you want that historic look, there's no better countertop surface than soapstone," Don remarks. Honed and brushed surfaces such as Peacock Leather and Cosmos Leather also are huge because unlike polished granite, they don't show fingerprints.

Continuing the tour, Don and Mary show off the revamped and expanded remnant yard. "A lot of people have smaller projects: vanity tops, bar tops, maybe an outside tabletop or grill," Don says. "It's more cost-efficient to use a remnant for a smaller job." And, it doesn't matter how small that job may be – one customer shopped the remnant yard just for the material for an outlet cover.

In just six months, business has boomed. Natural Stoneworks got a huge boost from the inaugural Historic Home Show and the BIA

show this spring. Plus, Lancaster Chamber of Commerce President Tom Baldrige cited Natural Stoneworks as an example of a successful local small business during The Chamber's Annual Dinner in July. "We have a lot of work," Ken says. "We count our blessings every day."

And, Natural Stoneworks is returning that good karma, staging granite tops and sinks that Habitat for Humanity's Re-Store picks up weekly. The Senfts also donated a granite top and base to the recent Wags & Whiskers benefit for the Humane League. "It sold before the dinner!" Mary says.

*Natural Stoneworks is located at 455 Ice Avenue. Phone 717-393-5818 or visit [www.naturalstoneworks.com](http://www.naturalstoneworks.com).*