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At last, Keith Griffith finds his calling

It takes a certain degree of dedication to build Shaker boxes and Amherst, N.H., resident Keith Griffith is definitely a devotee of the centuries-old craft. What's amazing about his story is the lengthy and circular path he took to finally realize his calling.

For 25 years, Griffith had focused on a career in high-tech finance, earning a Master's degree and steadily climbing up the corporate ladder. At one point, he directed the finances for a \$13 billion computer business in Europe.

"I was pretty big in the corporate world but was never really content with what I was doing," says Griffith, who now operates All Things Shaker out of a Manchester, N.H., storefront at 250 North Commercial St. The one-man operation, a full-time business since early 2012, recently launched a Web site (www.allthingsshaker.com) and is selling Shaker boxes, trays and carriers all over the country.

"I've always had a passion for woodworking," he says, "and I kept my hand in it over the years. I'd do small projects around the house. Plus, I have a particular fascination for the Shakers and their craftsmanship. They had some ideals that were quite progressive for their time. Their sense of community, work ethic, and design has a unique charm."

The Shakers, a religious group in 18th-century England, were also very pragmatic and dedicated to quality. They built finely-crafted storage boxes that were the "Tupperware of the 1700s."

"I'm not a really religious person," Griffith admits, "but I respect that kind of dedication. Although there's nothing terribly creative about Shaker boxes, there is a certain of elegance to their simplicity."

So Griffith toils away in his Manchester shop for 40-50 hours a week, displays his goods at trade shows all over the Northeast and markets his products any way he can. He takes pride in his workmanship, selecting the finest wood and paying close attention to detail.

"I spend extra time in the finishing process because that's what makes the boxes look great and last longer," explains Griffith.

In high school, Griffith won awards for making classic furniture pieces and he had his heart set on becoming a woodworker. His parents, however, convinced him to attend college and pursue a "professional" career, which he did – until recently.

That's when his wife, Marcia, unintentionally steered his life in a new direction, presenting him with a unique Christmas gift: a father-son class in Shaker box-making at nearby Canterbury Shaker Village.

It re-ignited Griffith's long-lost passion for woodworking. Pretty soon, he was making Shaker boxes for friends and attending crafts fairs. "People liked these quaint little boxes and I loved to make them," he says. "A friend of mine ordered 40 boxes as gifts for his executive team at a West Virginia hospital system. After that, I was hooked."

The rest is history. Griffith formed his new company, All Things Shaker, and starting making Shaker boxes every day. His passion is now reality.

"My wife can't quite believe what I'm doing and neither can I," he says. "But here I am. And I'm as happy as I've ever been."