

In the Studio

BY RAYMOND CHAPMAN

Dimensional Signage - Part 4

City Hall can be your friend.

THERE IS AN OLD ADAGE that says, "You can't fight city hall", but there can be times when city hall can be your friend. Many of us may have negative feelings when it comes to any association with our local governments. Trying to get permits and wading through beauracatic red tape and the officials associated with them is not something high on our list of favorite endeavors. But, those folks need signs from time to time just like the businesses we serve.

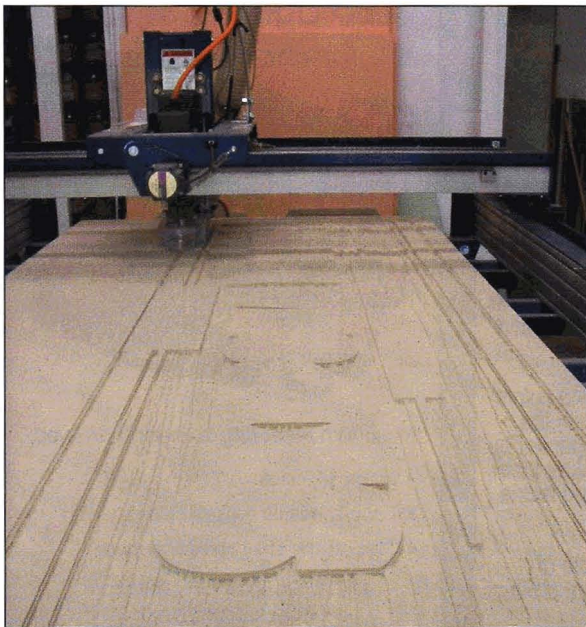
Many municipalities operate on a tight budget and normally choose only services that are offered by the lowest bidder. For years our efforts to get a foot in the door with local governing bodies simply was not very successful. Even

though our work was pleasing to them, the price tag was not.

Not long ago the director of a local Parks and Recreation Department had been in another city and noticed the unique signage done for that city—signs that were not just flat and plain. He gave us a call and that began a long association with the city that has provided us with the opportunity to do a whole system of dimensional signage. As long as the cost of these signs stays under a certain amount, they can order one at a time without having to go out for bids. Thankfully, I've found favor with the powers that be and have been able to expand the same service to other cities.

This article will demonstrate how we build some of the dimensional signs for local neighborhood parks. These are constructed of high density urethane (HDU) and finished with 100 percent acrylic water-based paints. For a long time we sandblasted the backgrounds, but now are able to produce the wood grain look with our ShopBot flatbed router.

Raymond Chapman owns Chapman Design Studio in Temple, Texas and has been producing signs for over 40 years. Besides being a frequent contributor to Sign Business, Ray will teach seminars at all Sign Business & Digital Graphics Shows in 2008. Contact him at ChapmanStudio@sbcglobal.net.



The design is cut into HDU using our favorite "toy" – a ShopBot PRTalpha flatbed CNC router. Most of the signs for the parks department of this city are identical except for the name, so no long paperwork is required for approval. They just call with the name and how many they need and we start feeding information to the ShopBot.



The finished HDU sign blank is now ready for painting. The router cut the wood grain background, the incised lettering, the cove edge, and then cut the panel to the finished shape. Much easier than sandblasting and doing all the hand cutting, plus there is not the bother of having HDU everywhere.



After blowing off any excess dust, panels are ready for painting. We begin by spraying on a coat of FSC-88 WB water-based primer made by Coastal Enterprises, using a HVLP spray gun. The set up is low-tach since there is a minimal amount of overspray and the paints are not toxic. A primer is not essential, but provides a nice, smooth finish for the final coats. Clean up is a breeze with just water.



Normally, we back up our HDU sign panels with either Medium Density Overlay (MDO), Dibond or aluminum. For these small park signs we cut the MDO panel to shape on the ShopBot, round over the back edge and then attach the panel to redwood post with screws and adhesive. The sign panel will be attached to this with epoxy, and no hardware will be visible. For larger panels we use a different method. The back side of the MDO and the posts have been painted prior to assembly.



My son Mike is spreading West System epoxy on the MDO backing and also on the back of the sign panel. So far we have experienced no failures using this method.



This photo shows our "Porter Clamping System". To assure good contact with the epoxy, Mike weighs down the center of the panel with paint cans and holds the edges in place with clamps. We want to be sure that there are no voids where moisture can creep in.



On some signs we will install a bolt between the backing board and the HDU sign panel for installation later on redwood posts. The bolts have a round head, and a small "slot" is carved into the back of the HDU so that everything fits together easily. A coat of epoxy is also brushed along the seam between the two panels for extra protection against moisture. When dry, the epoxy is scuffed with sandpaper and painted.

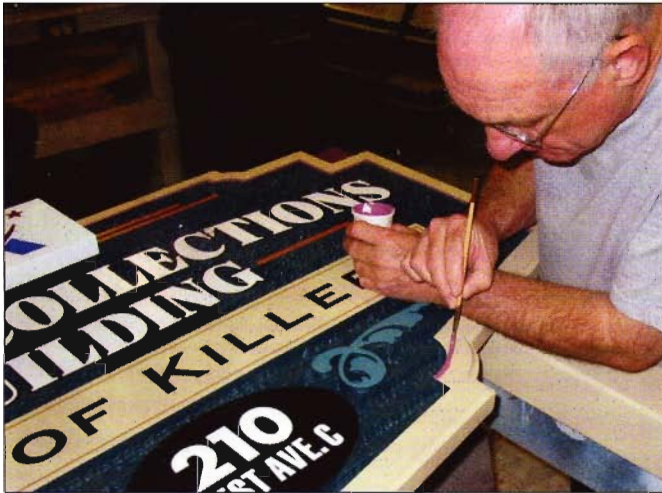
CONTINUED



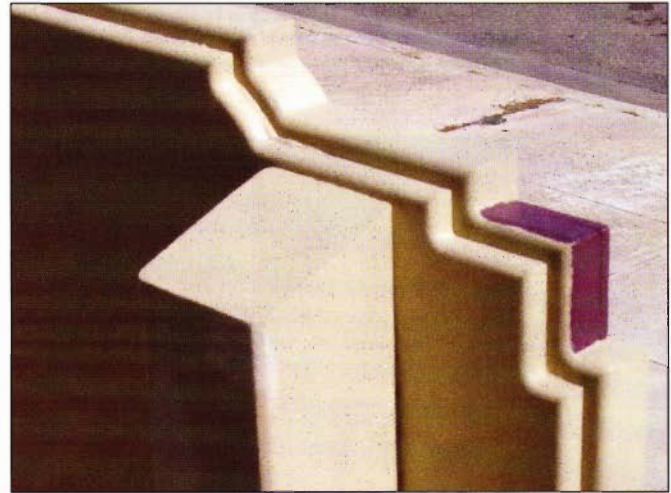
The background color is sprayed with a HVLV spray gun, then the trim and panels are painted with a brush using Porter 100 percent acrylics. The lettering is painted black, but will receive vinyl lettering that is slightly smaller so that a small black outline will remain around the copy. Everything receives two coats or more.



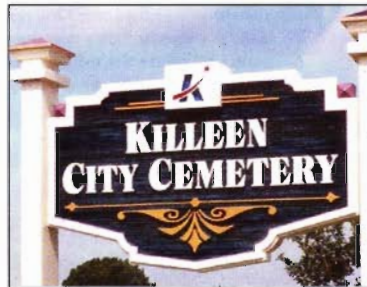
White, high performance vinyl is added for the main copy and the sign is getting close to completion. The city logo was made on a separate piece of HDU along with some prismatic squares that will be attached to the corners.



Hand painting an inline stripe with water-based paints completes the sign. All finishes are either 100 percent acrylics or high performance vinyl. These signs will last for years without needed attention...unless someone runs over them with an SUV, which has happened. Many of these have been up for years and need only a cleaning every year or so.



The completed sign has redwood posts and has no visible hardware. Edges are sealed and painted to protect against the Texas environment. City maintenance personnel take care of the installation.



Here are just a few of the more than 30 signs we have built for this city. Most are for neighborhood parks and range in size from 4' x 8' down to 3' x 4'. Several area cities have contacted us after seeing these and ordered signs for their communities.

