



## Income Opportunities

### Frank Pender of Tanglewood Timber Products promotes diversification and creativity

By Bob Bruce

The gravel driveway that leads to Frank Pender's wood processing empire (one hesitates to label it as merely a lumber sawing operation) opens onto one of the most eclectic equipment/storage yards you are likely to ever come across.

#### A Wood Geek's Candy Store

He's got easily a half dozen buildings, in various sizes and shapes, clustered around a central access loop -- his office, a big high-ceilinged woodworking shop, a three-sided shed with an industrial planer under cover, a couple of smaller out-buildings, and more.

But it's the spaces in between the buildings and what you find down every side path and vehicle trail that make the place feel like a giant candy store for wood geeks. In one spot, there's a pile of oak logs -- four feet in diameter and eight feet long. Around the bend, there is a collection of burl stumps. He's got Western Big Leaf Maple, Black Walnut, English Walnut, and a few hundred thousand board feet of unsawn fir timber, along with some piles of Madrona, Wild Cherry, White Oak, and Cottonwood.

And that's just the stuff he keeps on hand for slicing up into flooring, molding, trim, and cabinetry pieces. He also has piles of antique timber cutting and handling tools, moss rocks, cut slabs of exotically-figured wood, and an eye-popping collection of de-barked burls that look like they came to earth from some strange outer space dimension.

#### Diversification over Specialization

While some businesspeople feel that specialization is the key to success, Frank is the first to admit that his approach is more open-ended. Of course, he doesn't come right out and say so in so many words. His explanations tend to be more like parables -- maybe because he used to be a junior high school civics and history teacher.

For example, he tells the story of a big old oak tree that had to be removed from a backyard in Dundee, Ore. The oak tree ended up in his storage lot while he decided what to do with it. The trunk had a big curve in it, but the wood was nicely grained, so rather than chopping it all up into firewood, his plan was to keep it on hand until somebody came looking for flooring or trim molding.

"Then one day, a man came down here from Anacortes to buy some end sealer from me," says Frank. "I had some other people here that day also; it was a nice day, so he went walking down near my log piles. Suddenly there was this blood-curdling scream. I thought he'd fallen down into the log pile, so I go running out to the yard, and there he is running up to meet me, all excited and yelling, 'You got it! You got it!'"

"It turns out he was building a Viking ship, and he needed a bow and stern. He'd been looking for a tree with the right specifications everywhere from Banks to Monroe. He measured it off, and it had the right curvature and everything. You couldn't have grown this tree to meet the specs he had."



Anybody else probably would have made firewood out of that oak right from the start and been done with it. After all, how many times does a guy from the next state drop by your mill looking for parts for his Viking boat project? For Frank, it's simply another way to turn a profit from what you have available.

### **Lemons into Lemonade**

Remember the old adage, "If all you have is lemons then make lemonade"? Frank takes it a step further. He tells another story, this one concerning a big old pile of poison oak that was taking over the back corner of his acreage. Since he wasn't actively working that part of his property, when a local beekeeper showed up asking if he could set up some hives back there, Frank said OK.

"I had 24 colonies on the farm last year, and from that I got 20 pounds of honey per colony," he says. "The keeper mixed the honey from there in with the rest of his honey, but this year I've asked him to keep it all separate because people will buy the full combs because they believe they can use it to build up their resistance to poison oak by eating the honey and chewing on the combs. I've already got ten orders for the full honeycombs from the hives in the poison oak patch."

### **Creativity is One of the Keys**

Wait a second. Perhaps you are wondering what happened to the one-man custom milling operation. Frank advises anyone who cares to listen, that diversification and creative problem solving are the keys to success in today's economy. Specialization, he teaches, can too often lead to a dead end.

"I tell people to first ask themselves what value there is in the products you have in your forest land," he says. "Almost anything can be a revenue source. Take scotch broom – it's classified as a noxious weed, but I'm making walking sticks and canes out of it, and I sell them for pretty good money."

"I've had people come here and buy wild hazelnut sticks from me," he continues. "I let them go through the farm and pick out what they want. I sell the sticks for \$1 each. They use them to make fake trees for offices and places like that."

The way he sees it, income opportunities are everywhere if you're willing to pay attention to what you see and hear.

"A while back, I heard that there was a group looking for crotch-type trees to use for table bases," he says. So he found a prune orchard close by that was plowing up a section of trees in order to re-plant. He picked up 200 crotches just by being willing to haul them away and save the farmer the headache of having to dispose of them.

Frank was paid \$20 for each tree crotch -- roughly \$4,000.

### **It All Has Value**

Before anyone tries to give him one of those "what planet are you from?" looks, he points out that the big commercial lumber mills do pretty much the same thing he does, although perhaps without as much ingenuity.



“The big mills, like Weyerhaeuser, are very efficient because they make money on every part of the log -- the sawdust, the chips, the bark, the scraps, and all the other fall-down material. So can the small operator.”

For those who would like to follow in Frank’s footsteps, he says the path isn’t that difficult if you’re willing to ask directions. “Get involved in your community. Get involved in associations that deal with your timber products or the products on your farm. Get out there and communicate and share with people -- see what other people are doing.”

He also advises checking out some of the many “green” initiatives that have sprung up recently. “There are massive amounts of money in programs like that,” he says. “Take a look at the new farm bill; see what’s in there for forestry and forest landowners. Talk to the various soil and water conservation districts out there for help in enhancing your tree farm and your property.”

It’s just a matter of being observant, having an open mind, and being a little creative.