

Getting an Edge

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To the disappointment of many who know me, I have never been a detail man. Navy boot camp tried to change me. Making a tight bunk that would bounce a quarter, buffing black shoes with tiny cotton balls for hours, or making Brasso mirrors out of Navy collar devices only served, eventually, to drive me deeper into slothhood.

This personal shortcoming has at times manifested itself in my outdoor activities. For example, whether I'm filleting a fish or dressing a deer, the knife I carry always seems to be as dull as a rusty hoe. What to do?

The solution, or the quick fix, to a dull blade in the field came to me a few years ago by happenstance. One of my fishing and camping companions, Fred Hurley, a detail man, introduced me to a small pocket-size knife sharpener called, Tony's Sharpener. He gave me one, and I used it and became a believer. A few years after that, while skinning a tough elk in Colorado, the sharpener saved the day. (Elk hide will dull any blade the first five minutes of use).

So impressed was I with the sharpener's effectiveness and portability I got to know the Missouri man who made them, Tony Roberts. For years, I promoted and sold the device in the Northeast with Tony's help. Last summer Tony dropped a bombshell: "Sorry Paul," Tony said over the phone," but I have run out of steam. I'm hanging it up. No more sharpeners."

I wrote a goodbye column about Tony's exodus. As fate would have it, a Maine man who lives in Chicago read about Tony's business in the Northwoods Sporting Journal. Andy Ray, a 1991 UMO graduate and business major who owns ABCO Electrical Construction in the Windy City, had always wanted to get his two teenage sons in some kind of a small business. An active sportsman in his own right, Andy, along with his two boys Max and Parker, drove from Chicago to Diamond, Missouri to see Tony and his setup. Before the sun set that night above the Missouri hills, Andy and his boys closed a deal with Tony. Not before learning to make the sharpeners on Tony's metal press, however.

Andy and his sons trucked the manufacturing equipment back to Chicago and went to work. This all happened early last September. Since then they have ramped up the business, the marketing effort, and fine-tuned the production process. "We have been filling some large orders and adding staff already," says Andy.

"Why did you do this?" I asked Andy. I liked his answer: "I wanted to give my boys a chance to learn how to work for themselves and have an entrepreneurial spirit," offered Andy.

So there you have it. If you are one of the many potential Tony Sharpener customers who have been turned away there is good news. The Tony Sharpener is back in business under new ownership. I have field-tested the new ones and they are excellent. Tony Roberts taught Andy and his boys well.

To learn more about how to purchase a Tony's Sharpener check out www.tonyssharpener.com.

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