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## Local man making works of art you can play pool with.

It took Keith Josey, a perfectionist just five years to become a world-class maker of custom pool cues.

His are works of art—with inlays of exotic wood and stones, perfectly balanced and polished to a high gleam.

“He’s the best,” said Andy Samuels, a Youngstown, Ohio cue collector, who has nine of Josey’s.

“Keith makes the best hitting cues I’ve ever played with. I’ve tried a lot of cues from different makers, but his are the best ... perfectly balanced. Plus, I like his workman-

ship... he does nice work,” Samuels said.

The price: \$200 for the “Sneaky Pete” cue to \$3,100 and up, said Josey, whose “Josey Custom Cues and Repairs” business is on Savannah’s southside.

.Josey does all his’ work in a well-equipped shop in his backyard. Partially made pool sticks hang from the shop’s walls. The exotic wood and stones used in the pieces are neatly filed away.

Josey has become so good at his trade that he was featured recently in “The American Cueist,” a national

pool magazine. His pool sticks are selling in five countries and also being used by two touring professionals.

In 1988, Josey dropped off his cue at a repair shop and when he got it back, the ferrule around the tip of the cue’s point had a cut on it.

Naturally, Josey the perfectionist took it back.

“The guy told me, ‘Well, sometimes that happens.’ I didn’t like the job or the excuse, so I bought me a kit



and started doing repair work.”

That was the beginning. In 1992, he started making custom cues. Josey took a two-week vacation in Tampa, Fla., to learn the trade from Wayne Gunn and Dale Perry, both longtime cue makers.

Today, Josey, 40, a Savannah Electric and Power Co. employee, is considered one of the best upcoming crafters in the world, according to Samuels and

the people who buy his cues.

“Once I finish a fine cue, I keep fine-tuning it,” he said. “I’ll keep doing that, I guess, until people say I’m the best in the world.

“My business is doing something perfect. That comes from working with my father (Skip Josey). He wouldn’t accept anything but perfect work. I’m a perfectionist, I guess.”

While growing up, Josey worked with his father building custom houses.

To make a custom cue, it takes plenty of patience and talent, and about a month - depending on the amount of work that goes into it.

Josey begins by seasoning the wood, dipping it in a wood stabilizer. He turns it on a lathe six times, after each dipping. That, he said, keeps the cue from warping.

“You got to let the wood move and breathe ... so it won’t warp,” he said.

He cuts the mother-of-pearl, turquoise and other stones in various patterns and glues the inlays into female pockets cut in the pool stick. When everything is finished, the cues are a beautiful work of art.

Every year, he turns out about 50 cues, most specially ordered. However, he does keep a few sticks in a case that he carries to pool shows.

“I went to Macon recently to a show and sold three one-of-a-kinds,” he said.

Samuels’ \$3,100 showcase cue is a thing of beauty, Josey said. It’s also the most expensive cue Josey has made, although he’s working on a more expensive one now.

Samuels’ cue has 56 inlays - things like ivory, mother-of-pearl and turquoise, along with exotic woods. It took about three months to build, Josey said.

Shawn Putnam of Georgetown, S.C., will soon get a showcase cue, Josey said. Putnam, a pool professional, is sponsored by Josey on the professional tour.

“I supply him with cues,” Josey said. “He travels across the country shooting on the pro circuit. I’m making him a showpiece cue now ... (He) wants something flashy.”

Teruki Kobaynshi of Okaynma, Japan, a tour professional, also plays with a Josey cue.

Putnam, a pro player for five years, rates Josey among “the na-

tion’s top 10 cue-makers as far as quality and workmanship ... everything is perfect.” Putnam likes the stiffness in Josey cues.

Before using Josey cues, Putnam played with Southwest (brand) cues.

“It takes five years to get a Southwest cue, if you ordered it today,” Putnam said. “When I got my Josey cue, I put the Southwest away. Josey has the better cue.”

Most of Josey’s custom cues are sold outside of Chatham County. Players in Italy, Japan, Korea and Germany are among those who have bought his cues.

“Those - the one-of-a-kind - are the high dollar cues,” Josey said. “People who buy them can be assured I won’t make another one that looks the same.”

Josey plans to make cues part time for a few more years then retire and devote full time to his business.

Josey’s wife, Sherri, said military traffic is a big boost to the family’s business.

“They leave and go to other countries, and naturally they play pool with cues Keith has made,” she said. “That’s how we get a lot of foreign business.”

Although Sherri steers clear of making cues, she’s actively involved in the business. She handles all the paperwork and helps design the cues.

“I’m the supervisor,” she said, a smile playing across her face. “He makes them and I (help) design them. After he finishes, I put my stamp of approval on them.”

Sherri is “an excellent pool player,” Josey said. “But we got so busy making them (cues) that she had to quit”

Soon she will have to divide her time between the business and motherhood. Sherri, five months pregnant, is expecting a boy in mid-October. They have been married 13 years and the baby will be their first.

“Then,” Josey said, “I’ll have me a boy to help in the shop.”