

Oregon youth is a chip off the old block

By Tammy Walro
Press Staff Writer

"What do you want to be when you grow up?"

Ten years ago, Coy Elementary second-grader Jim Mlynek was asked that question by his teacher.

In his neatest printing, Jim wrote, "I would like to be a landscaper because I like to work outside with loaders, trees and rocks, and my dad." Assorted pictures of loaders cut and glued onto the paper punctuated his point.

While few kids in second grade are clear on their career paths — today, studies show that many adults change even their chosen careers once or twice during their lifetimes — young Jim never wavered. He spent weekends and summers getting up at the crack of dawn to work with his dad at Woodville Road Nursery, the family business begun by his grandfather in 1960.

Now 17, Jim has taken money he saved from working with his dad, and put it into what he believes is a "rock solid" investment. He has become a partner in the nursery business and will largely oversee operation of the new Stone Yard, which will open next month.

Those driving past Woodville Road Nursery have noticed land being cleared and the addition of several outdoor bins that hold landscaping stones in assorted sizes and colors. Boulders, stones and rocks in all sizes and shapes have also been brought in to complement the nursery stock available to customers. A brand new delivery truck painted with "The Stone Yard" sits outside, ready to make deliveries.

The business has grown steadily since it was started more than 40 years ago as a hobby by Jim's grandfather, Tom Mlynek, a wood pattern maker by



Jim Mlynek started landscaping at a young age. (Press photo by Ken Grosjean)

trade. Jim's father, also named Jim, took over the business in 1977.

"As a young kid, Jim would come here and play and do whatever he could to help out," Mr. Mlynek said. "He had a natural interest and knack for landscaping, which he has developed through hands-on experience. At 17, he already has 10 or 11 years of experience under his belt."

Jim is also pursuing his interest as a junior in Clay High School's agriculture program, which was recognized last year by the National Association of

Agricultural Educators as one of the top six agricultural programs in the county.

He and classmates Kurt Eversman, Mike Rock, and Dean Wittly recently earned third-place honors in a team competition at a state competition for students in nursery/landscape management careers.

"The idea for the stone yard was really Jim's," his father said. "Last May, we began clearing some land, and spent the summer traveling 5,000 miles over 6 or 7 states deciding what kind of

stone we would carry." When the stone yard opens, there will be several varieties available from tiny groundcover pebbles to large rocks, some coming from as far away as Mexico and California.

"A lot of customers have asked us about getting in landscaping stones," Jim said. "It's a natural complement to the landscaping and retail plant business - we already incorporate rocks and stone into many of the landscape designs we do."

Over the years, the business has built up a regular clientele, which comes to the Woodville Road location from as far away as Michigan, Fremont, Port Clinton and Perrysburg. "Our reputation has been built over the years largely by word of mouth," Mr. Mlynek said. "In a business like this, you're really going by your work and your word."

Both men said they feel business will continue to thrive, as homeowners are extending their living areas outside and are seeking relaxed, comfortable surroundings in their yard and patio areas.

"Today, people's lives are hectic, and they want their homes to be a place where they can relax and kick back," Mr. Mlynek said. "The trend is toward creating a natural landscape, and we feel the new stone yard will only enhance what we can offer our customers."

Meanwhile, Jim says he looks forward to making the Stone Yard a success, and doesn't rule out taking over the business from his dad some day. Younger brother, Kirk, who is 12, will be helping out this summer too.

"I'm happy to have Jim as a partner, and at this point, I'd be happy just to have a weekend off now and then," Mr. Mlynek said.

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