

# Where gravestones are a work of art

## High-tech tools, artist's touch mainstays at Gingrich Memorials

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MIDDLETOWN — At Gingrich Memorials, a company that traces its roots to Lebanon, technology supplements skills that artists and craftsmen take years to perfect.

Jim and Karen Gingrich own the business that began when Jim's grandfather, Harvey Gingrich, purchased a memorial company owned by H.I. Dougherty of Lebanon in 1921. Thirty years later, Jim's dad, Russel, bought Luckenbill Monuments here, which now serves as company headquarters.

In addition to a Lebanon office, Gingrich has five other satellite offices, in Palmyra, Mechanicsburg, Ephrata, Lancaster and New Bloomfield, Perry County.

"We do business throughout all of central Pennsylvania," Karen Gingrich said. "We work with thousands of cemeteries."

"It's unusual now that we have our own manufacturing facility," Jim Gingrich said. "It's a craft that takes a lot of years to learn. We do all of our own work."

"When monuments come to us, they're cut and polished. There is no lettering or design on them," he said.

Most of the traditional gray granite here comes from quarries in Barre, Vt. Other granite is shipped from the Midwest, Canada, India and China.

"Granite is one of the hardest substances there is," Jim said. "The saws used to cut it are diamond saws. Granite will look virtually the same thousands of years from now. I took a trip to Italy and saw some granite obelisks that were 3,500 years old, and you couldn't tell how old they were."

Around the turn of the 20th century, marble was

often used for monuments, but marble starts to wear away after about 100 years because it is softer.

In addition to grave markers, Gingrich produces civic monuments, such as a Harrison School monument on Maple Street in Lebanon; veterans memorials, like the war memorial recently dedicated in West Lebanon Township; and personal awards and plaques.

Jim and Karen's son, Nathan, handles computer-aided design layouts.

"I have thousands of components I can use to create," Nathan said, mentioning military service and Masonic emblems among the most familiar. "I try to personalize it a little more."

After Nathan creates the design on his computer, a rubber stencil is cut and then placed over the stone for sandblasters to do their work.

Three methods are used to add art and lettering to Gingrich's monuments: sandblasting, laser etching and hand etching.

Artist Stephanie Britten handles etching.

"We mainly use the laser for portraits and snapshots people have," Britten said. "We try to use high-quality images."

Any blemish on a photo will be picked up by the computer-aided design system connected to the laser, so if the photo isn't sharp, Britten will hand-etch the art work, using a diamond-tip tool.

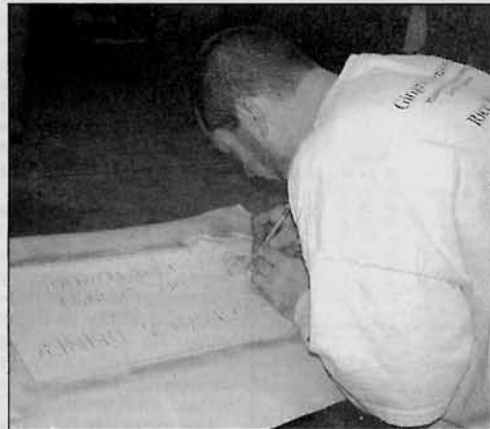
"It's very similar to tattoos," she said of her work, "although it's more similar to scrimshaw in that I'm taking polish away from the stone."

Sandblasters Humberto Miranda and Daniel Mancill, both Lebanon residents, handle lettering and some art work, like flowers, which they carve with Exacto



Steve Snyder / Lebanon Daily News

Jim Gingrich, owner of Gingrich Memorials, poses with a granite memorial that features a detailed outdoors scene.



Steve Snyder / Lebanon Daily News

Daniel Mancill of Lebanon uses an Exacto knife to intricately carve out a small design on a gravestone. Right: Staff artist Stephanie Britten uses an etching tool to sharpen the image on a gravestone.



knives. "It's intricate work," Jim said. "It's a craft you learn, especially shaping flowers."

Etchings are becoming more popular every year. "There's no limit to what you can do," Jim said. "You are basically commissioning an artist to create a painting."

Among the etchings Britten has done are ships, race cars, seascapes and outdoor scenes, as well as portraits.

For more information, call 272-0901 or 838-1711 or visit the Web site [www.gingrichmemorials.com](http://www.gingrichmemorials.com).  
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