

The Maple Lake MESSSENGER *Extra*

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Darwin Monument: *creating beautifully engraved memorials since 2007*

By Brenda Erdahl

Choosing a memorial for a loved one or yourself can be a daunting task.

At Darwin Monument, owners Jenny and Mark Smith strive to make the process easier by listening with compassion, providing up front pricing and using their impeccable craftsmanship to create the perfect memorial.

"Customers always leave saying 'oh this was a lot easier than I thought it would be,'" Jenny said

Families in central Minnesota have trusted Darwin Monument for more than a decade as a cost-effective option to buy a memorial. A small, family owned company, Mark, Jenny, their daughter Emily and Wendy Wuotila will work with you from start to finish to complete the memorial. When you walk into their office located on Highway 12 in Darwin, you will be greeted by Jenny and Wendy who will walk you through the process, starting by picking out the shape and granite color.

"We'll sit down with you and show you some designs and options," Jenny said.

They do all the layouts on the computer so you can receive a printed rendering of the memorial.

Often their design book has just what the customer is looking for, but other times customers have their own ideas and Wendy and Jenny will work with them to come up with the perfect layout. They can work off pictures and have custom scenes and items replicated if it isn't in the design book, some examples would be farm and cabin/lake scenes, cars, trucks, tractors, etc.

"One customer brought in a picture of their loved one's convertible. We made a design, they proofed it and we engraved it," Jenny said. "We don't sell the stone until we have the design



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right," she added.

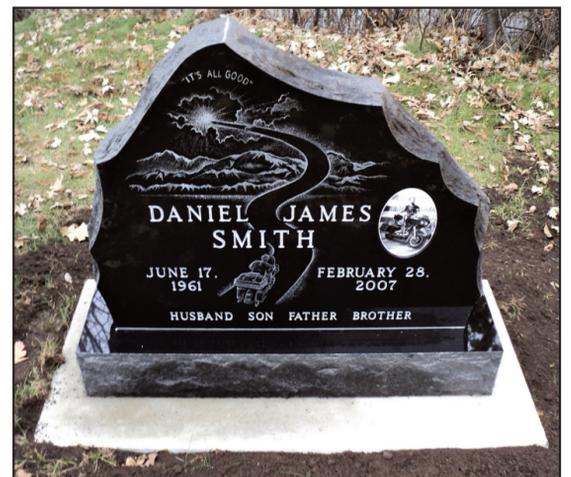
Layout is one of the first steps to purchasing a memorial. During that initial, free consultation visit, even if the customer is just price checking, Jenny and Wendy will make sure they put a layout of their vision in the customer's hands. It helps Darwin Monument give an accurate cost estimate and the customers can then take the layout to their cemetery to compare it with other memorials. After the layout is approved and the name placement has been verified with the cemetery, the stencil is cut, and Mark and Emily will do the engraving and etching. Darwin Monument stocks all the standard shaped memorials including flat markers, beveled, slanted and upright monument styles and they offer them in 30 different colors of granite. The standard shapes take four to six weeks to engrave and set in the cemetery. Memorials crafted into unique shapes, like hearts, can take up to three months. The time of year and weather will also determine when the stone is set.

They also do a lot of shape carving for clients. Shape carving adds more texture to the engraving, Jenny said. "We don't charge extra to shape carve, it's just part of the service."

Another popular feature is etching. Darwin Monument recently purchased an etching machine so now they can complete any etching project in house.



Above, when you walk into Darwin Monument on Highway 12 in Darwin, you will be greeted by Wendy Wuotila and Jenny Smith who will walk you through the process of creating a unique memorial. At right, Emily Smith, daughter of owners Jenny and Mark, is in the process of engraving a monument. At far right, some customers choose to incorporate all three elements - engraving, etching and ceramic photos on their memorial.



Etching is more detailed than engraving and is usually done on black granite because that is where the contrast is the best, Jenny said. They can also incorporate ceramic photos in black and white and color. The photos are guaranteed forever not to flake or separate. Some customers choose to incorporate all three elements, engraving, etching and ceramic photos on their memorial.

Once the memorial is engraved, concrete is poured and any extra options are added, Darwin Monument will set the memorial in the cemetery or location of your choice, traveling as far as 50 miles without additional charges. They make all the arrangements for placement, completing the memorial process from start to finish.

Cremation

In addition to memorials, Darwin Monument offers engravable cremation vaults, two or four niche columbariums and benches. Their cremation benches have room for two urns underneath the removable seat. Darwin Monument also sells marble and steal urns and coming soon, black granite urns that can be etched.

Customers can also order per-

sonalized memory benches that look nice anywhere and are a great way to preserve someone's memory, Jenny said.

"We also have personalized garden rocks and crocks which make nice wedding, anniversary and housewarming presents."

Darwin Monument is located at 116 E Highway 12 in Darwin. For more information visit their website at darwinmonument.com or call 320-693-5902.



Mark and Emily Smith do all the engraving in house. They can engrave almost anything including custom images from cars to cabin/lake scenes to tractors.



Personalized memory benches like this one look nice anywhere and are a great way to preserve a memory. (Photos submitted)



Darwin Monument's new etching machine offers a more detailed option to traditional engraving.

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Top gifts for your valentine

Valentine's Day is an opportunity to show the ones you love just how much you care about them. This is achieved through various gestures, including giving heartfelt gifts.

Research from Business Insider found that 51 percent of Americans now celebrate Valentine's Day. While a recent poll from Insights West found that although many Canadians view Valentine's Day as overly commercial, 75 percent still plan on celebrating it. People are still spending big bucks on making Valentine's Day special. The National Retail Federation indicates Americans spent more than \$20.7 billion on the holiday in 2019 and forecasters predict similar spending in 2020.

Every Valentine's Day, certain gifts emerge as the most popular. While certain gifts are common, there are ways to make them seem fresh and exciting. Here are some ideas for Valentine's Day gifting.

Flowers

The National Retail Federation estimates that people spend around \$2 billion on flowers for gifts. While roses are much

sought after, thinking outside the bouquet can produce unique results. Choose different blooms, perhaps a loved one's favorite flower or something regional. Potted plants also will last longer than cut flowers, giving them more staying power. Skip bouquets in favor of table centerpieces, which can be eye-catching.

Jewelry

Gifting jewelry can be tricky because it is such a personal gift that must tie into a sweetheart's style. It may be tempting to go with something large and flashy or full of diamonds, but a better option is to take inventory of what your loved one wears on a daily basis and try to mimic the size and scope in your gift. Other thoughtful jewelry gifts include understated pendant necklaces or bracelets engraved with key dates or the names of their children. Colored gemstones in lieu of diamonds also may be a striking choice.

Entertainment

Dinner and a movie is a classic date night, but on Valentine's Day restaurants and theaters may be overcrowded and only

offer limited menus. An alternative can be to arrange for a gourmet meal to be delivered and wrap up a new streaming movie/TV device already primed with a subscription to his or her favorite streaming service. Then all you need to do is snuggle on the sofa for a romantic night in.

Chocolates and candy

Roughly \$1.8 billion is spent on candy each Valentine's Day, says the National Retail Federation. A box of chocolates certainly can fit the bill, but other options abound. Perhaps a sweetheart has a favorite candy that recalls his or her childhood or prefers a chocolate maker from his or her hometown. Purchase those items to add a bit of nostalgia. Make the holiday magical by setting up a candy bar right at home, where your sweetheart can pick and choose from candies displayed in eye-catching bowls and canisters. Another novel idea is to use candy molds to make your own sweet treats.

Thoughtful Valentine's Day gifts can make the day even more special for sweethearts.



While certain gifts are common, there are ways to make them seem fresh and exciting. Here are some ideas for Valentine's Day gifting. (Photo submitted)



To further enhance the Groundhog Day experience, burrow into these interesting facts about the holiday and the animal itself. (Photo submitted)

Groundhog Day fun and facts

Groundhog Day offers a touch of whimsy during the often bleak midwinter chill. Across the country, eager celebrants await a rascally rodent to determine if there will be six more weeks of winter or if the nation will receive an early reprieve from the cold.

It is fun to guess if an early spring is coming, and even more so to rely on a large ground squirrel to play meteorologist. To further enhance the Groundhog Day experience, burrow into these interesting facts about the holiday and the animal itself.

- The world can thank the Germans for the Groundhog Day tradition. The see-his-shadow concept was adapted from a German Candlemas Day tradition in which clergymen would bless the candles they needed for the cold season. If the candles brought a sunny day, there would be six more weeks of winter. However, clouds and rain signified that winter would end soon. Germans who settled in Pennsylvania in the 1700s brought the custom to America.
- Germans once used a hedge-

hog as their animal forecaster. When relocating to Pennsylvania, groundhogs were used because they were more common than hedgehogs.

- Punxsutawney Phil is perhaps most revered for his forecasting abilities. However, more than a dozen states have their own prognosticating groundhogs. These include Buckeye Chuck in Ohio, Birmingham Bill in Alabama and General Beauregard Lee in Georgia.

- Phil has been predicting the weather at Gobbler's Knob for more than 130 years. This is quite a feat considering groundhogs typically live between six and eight years. Folklore indicates Phil sips a magical drink that will prolong his life for seven more years.

- Phil's full name is Punxsutawney Phil, Seer of Seers, Sage of Sages, Prognosticator of Prognosticators, and Weather-Prophet Extraordinary.

- Groundhogs also are called woodchucks and are a species of rodent known as marmots. They typically weigh between 12 and 15 pounds. Woodchucks really have

nothing to do with wood or chucking. The name stems from an Algonquian name wuchak.

- The National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration says Phil has seen his shadow more times than not between 1887 and 2019. Statistically speaking, six more weeks of winter is often the norm.

- Groundhogs prefer to live in open country or at woodland edges. They are never far from a burrow made in well-drained soil. Most have summer and winter dens.

- Groundhogs are adept at predicting the arrival of spring, just not in the way people have come to know from Groundhog Day. Since they hibernate, when groundhogs emerge from their burrows, it's a sure sign spring is on its way.

- The 1993 movie "Groundhog Day" starring Bill Murray helped solidify Punxsutawney Phil as a national hero and household name. Since then, crowds numbering as high as 30,000 have made the pilgrimage to see Phil in person.

Groundhog Day brings some levity to an otherwise uneventful time of year.

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How did "XO" come to symbolize kisses and hugs?

Love letters are a great way for couples to express their affection and devotion to each other. The sentiments expressed in love letters are as unique as the couples who write them. However, love letters often contain one particular turn of phrase regardless of their authors.

When signing a love letter, it's customary for writers to include at least one "XO" near their names. "XO" is widely recognized as symbolic of wishing "hugs and kisses" to a letter's intended recipient. This tradition is such an ingrained part of romantic letter writing that few may stop to pause and wonder just how the letters "XO" came to symbolize hugs and kisses.

The origins of "XO" are not definitively known, though many historians note that signing letters with "X" dates back to the Middle Ages. Few people could read and write in the Middle Ages, but signing "X" did not require either of those abilities. Christianity played a big part in many people's lives during the Middle Ages, and "X" was seen as a representation of

the Christian cross. So when people signed "X" on legal documents, they were essentially stating the contents of the document were true in the name of Jesus Christ.

While Jesus Christ's teachings are rooted in showing compassion for one's fellow man, signing a letter with "X" did not symbolize love in the Middle Ages. In fact, that development did not come about until much later. The Oxford English Dictionary attributes the first use of "X" to symbolize love and/or kisses in a letter to English naturalist Gilbert White. However, some historians debate the accuracy of that attribution, saying White's use of the letter "X" in his letter was likely meant to convey blessings on the letter's recipient.

Researcher Stephen Goranson found many uses of the letter "X" to convey love and/or kisses in or after the 1880s, so it's very likely that this was the first time that including the letter "X" at the end of a letter took on the meaning so many people give it now.

As for "O" symbolizing

hugs, even less is known about how that came about. The late American writer Leo Rosten, whose writings included 1968's "The Joys of Yiddish," suggested that including "O" at the end of a letter might have a similar origin story to "X." Rosten theorized that "O" was used by Jewish immigrants who did not want to sign a document with "X," which they, like the people in the Middle Ages, interpreted as symbolic of the Christian cross.

Exactly when "O" was paired with "X" and came to symbolize hugs is unknown, though various historians suggest the two were not paired until the latter half of the 20th century.

"XO" is widely recognized as symbolic of wishing "hugs and kisses" to a letter's intended recipient. This tradition is such an ingrained part of romantic letter writing that few may stop to pause and wonder just how the letters "XO" came to symbolize hugs and kisses.

(Photo submitted)



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						 Maple Lake Ice Fishing Derby
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Silver Creek Township Meeting, 7 p.m. Corinna Township Meeting, 7 p.m. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hasty-Silver Creek Sportsman's Club Meeting, 7 p.m. Maple Lake Chamber of Commerce meeting at the Bethlehem United Church, 12 p.m. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sons of the American Legion, 8 p.m. Lions Club Meeting, 7 p.m. at The V by HH Legion Riders Meeting, 6:30 p.m. at Legion Club Book Club, 11:00 at Irish Blessings Coffee House 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Bird Hours at ML Library, 10 a.m. - noon 	
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chatham Township Meeting, 7 p.m. American Legion Meeting, 7:30 p.m. Late Start 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> President's Day Cherry Pie at the ML Library 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wright Saddle Club Meeting, 7:30 p.m. Maple Lake Legion Auxiliary, 7 p.m. 	 Valentine's Day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Bird Hours at ML Library, 10 a.m. - noon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ML Library Lego Saturday, 10 a.m. - noon 	
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
	 PRESIDENTS' DAY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maple Lake City Council Meeting, 7 p.m. Albion Township Meeting, 7 p.m. Corinna Township Meeting, 7 p.m. Maple Lake Township Meeting, 7 p.m. 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Bird Hours at ML Library, 10 a.m. - noon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ML Library Youth Game Day, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
23	24	25	26	27	28	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wright County Snowmobile Assoc. Meeting, 7:30 p.m. at Legion Club 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ML Library Adult Game Day, noon - 3 p.m. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Bird Hours at ML Library, 10 a.m. - noon 	

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