

BROOM: 'Not a lot of people have seen soap being made'

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After traveling across Iowa to find most of her parts, Bardole found herself driving to Franklin, Neb., in 2007 to collect the rest of the broom making equipment. She decided to name the business after the town, and she said was a common practice for broom makers to name their shops after the place where they found their machinery.

But the challenge continued when Bardole had to find enough new wood to finish building the machinery.

"We had to completely build up all new equipment because the wooden frames for these were either non-existent or what there was, was not useable," she said. "Thankfully, I had some good relationships at Living History Farms and was able to go take some measurements off their machinery.

Bardole's steps to making soap and brooms

SOAP

Start by mixing lye and lard, which comes from local, free-range hogs. The mixture is stirred in a crock with a large wooden spoon for an hour.

The mixture is poured into a mold and left to sit overnight.

The soap is cut into bars the next day, when it has a texture similar to fudge. They then sit for an additional two weeks before packaging.

The other big hurdle, Bardole said, was finding the right market for her historic products. One of her first major soap making appearances was at Wheatsfield Cooperative and while other vendors were able to hand out samples of their product,

Bardole decided to show off her "old-timey" method to draw in an audience.

"I decided I'll just make soap, so we'll see how that goes. A number of people looked down and went 'What are you making there? Is that butter?' They would start the conversation," she said. "They were interested to see what I was doing right there in the store."

Since then, Bardole now travels to do demonstrations across central Iowa and sells at craft shows throughout the year. Her fragrance-free soap is sold at Wheatsfield and her brooms are sold at Hokel Machine Supply, The Pumpkin Patch and Hy-Vee Drug Store.

The business also recently launched a new website, www.Franklin-BroomWorks.com, and Bardole also expanded her

BROOMS

The process begins by stripping seeds from broomcorn, a type of sorghum which Bardole gets from Greene County. Bristles then need to be soaked in water, or they may break during the process.

Bristles are loaded onto a "kicker" machine, which tightly wraps the bristles around the handle.

The broom is loaded onto a sewing vice, which holds the broom in place while the bristles are sewn together and secured to the handle.

The finished product is then placed on a "cutter," where Bardole trims off any loose edges on the bristles.

business after moving the equipment out of an apartment and into a new house. Her new home allows for one designated soap and broom making room, "to keep all the mess in one room."

While Bardole said she never expects to work full-time with her business, she said she hopes to continue adding more demonstrations into her schedule.

"One of the things I love most about it is the education component," she said. "Not a lot of people have seen soap being made and even fewer have seen brooms being made. So I think there's a little bit of wow factor. So to be able to take that out and be able to have good conversations with people, even if I don't make a sale, it's really great to just educate people on a historic craft and the way things used to be done."

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