

Steve Showalter – Fireworks - 2

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Let's tune in to the tv show My Fair Wedding. This series specializes in producing fancy weddings for television, and this particular wedding includes an elaborate fireworks display. Believe it or not, the fireworks were provided and operated by a family from rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Last week we learned about Steve and Peggy Showalter from Inman, Kansas. They own and operate Showalter Fireworks for consumers and Rainbow Fireworks for display fireworks. It all began with the Showalters shooting fireworks on the family farm near Inman, Kansas. Now they have developed a business to market fireworks and produce fireworks shows around the region.

How does this business work? "We go to China and select the products," Steve said. "We watch for quality and the reliability of the manufacturer. We look for what's new and what's priced so that customers will think it's a good buy."

The selected products leave from Shanghai or Hong Kong to Los Angeles by steamship. After passing through U.S. Customs they come by train to Dallas or Kansas City and are delivered to the Showalter's farm by truck. The Showalter's crew will store and organize the products in fireworks-approved storage containers.

The Showalters maintain several storage facilities, including one near Inman, one in Oklahoma, and one near the rural community of Dearing, Kansas, population 413 people. Now, that's rural.

This is a family, entrepreneurial business. For example, they have expanded the business to include inflatables, those giant bouncy play places which kids enjoy. The company owns more than 40 of these inflatables. "At a small town festival or a county fair, our crew can do the inflatables during the day and do the fireworks at night," Steve said.

The Showalters also offer free training schools for those who want to shoot display fireworks, which require a permit from the State of Kansas and the U.S. government. "We teach safety issues as well as what we've learned from practical experience to get a quality shoot," Steve said. "It's easy to get an operator's license and U.S. government permit," he said. "People can get these licenses if they want to do a festival or even a family or company event themselves."

The school is offered free on demand. Steve did six schools during spring 2012 and will do another six this fall.

Remember I said this is a family business? All five of Steve and Peggy's children have their fireworks operator permits. Matthew, Michelle, Sean, Amber, and Stephanie all help out during the busy times. In fact, this year a grandson will be doing a show.

Safety is a top priority for the Showalter shows. Modern technology is a big plus, especially when planning shows in new venues. "For every event we go on Googleearth and do an analysis to see if it is possible to do a show from a safety standpoint," Steve said. "We also do a site visit and physically inspect the venue," he said. Then they design the fireworks to fit the setting.

“It’s possible to shoot fireworks within a ballpark,” Steve said. “The regulations require 70 feet of clearance for every inch of shell, and we always plan for extra space to allow for the wind.”

The Showalters have a saying: Fireworks are not just for the Fourth of July any more. They will start shooting shows in April and go through New Year’s Eve. In fact, the Showalters can design fireworks displays for all types of events to include concerts, employee appreciation events, trade shows, conventions, company picnics, grand openings, private gatherings, commemorative events, and of course, weddings. When the producers of My Fair Wedding wanted fireworks, Steve Showalter got the call.

For more information, go to www.fireworks-display.com.

This episode of the tv show My Fair Wedding has come to an end, but it featured a fireworks display designed and produced by Steve Showalter from Inman, Kansas. We salute Steve and Peggy Showalter and all their family involved with Showalter Fireworks and Rainbow Fireworks for making a difference with their hard work and entrepreneurship. Without such creativity and business development, the rural economy could go up in smoke.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.