

# Profile:



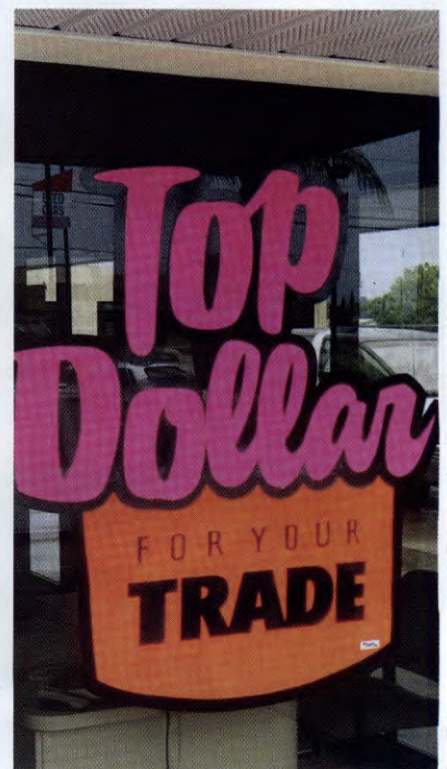
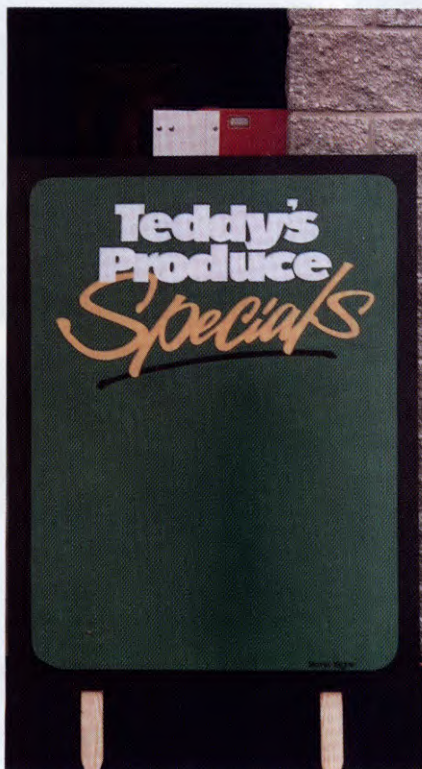
## Sam Pitino New Port Richey, Florida

It all started for Sam Pitino when he was a senior at Ridgewood High School in 1986. "They needed a bunch of parking signs," Sam recalls, "so I volunteered. They gave me some watercolors, stencils, and a big stack of plywood. I made the signs and found that I enjoyed it, so I told my art teacher that I would be interested in that sort of trade. Not long afterward, a sign shop called the school looking for part-time help and I went to work for them."

Sam saw his first copy of *SignCraft* while working at that shop. It was through the magazine that he was first exposed to the work of Bob Behounek and Mike Stevens — and it really caught his eye. "It was seeing Mike's work and the Chicago stuff that helped me realize the kind of work I wanted to do eventually."

Sam bounced around between a few other sign shops over the next year. He spent a while working at an instant sign shop, running their computer. He's glad he had the opportunity to learn about the equipment, but the work became too routine for him. "I decided to split that scene after I read Mike Stevens' articles in *SignCraft* and his book, *Mastering Layout*. It was really the lettering and the other creative aspects of the trade that appealed to me in the first place."

Sam went on to work at Keystone Signs in Hudson, Florida. There he learned a lot of the basics of lettering. "Frank Richie is a terrific letterer and was a big influence," says Sam.



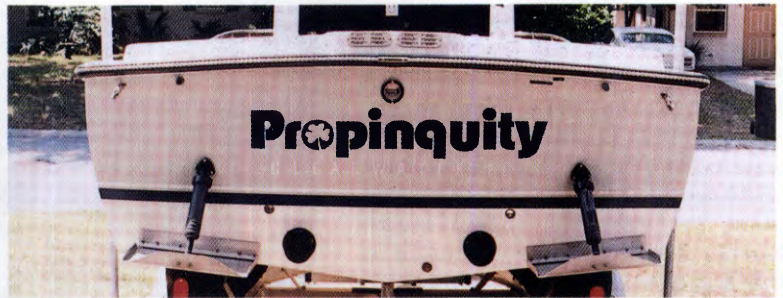
Turn to page 78

While working at Keystone, Sam spent his evenings practicing lettering and layout. Then in 1988, Sam started working on his own. The first shop was in the garage at his mother's

house, where he did painted and paper signs, and subcontract work for some of the area's shops.

By the spring of 1990, Sam had outgrown the garage and decided it

was time to look for more shop space. He stopped by Weber and Bell, a local wood sign shop, and asked if they knew of any available space. They suggested that he rent the space next

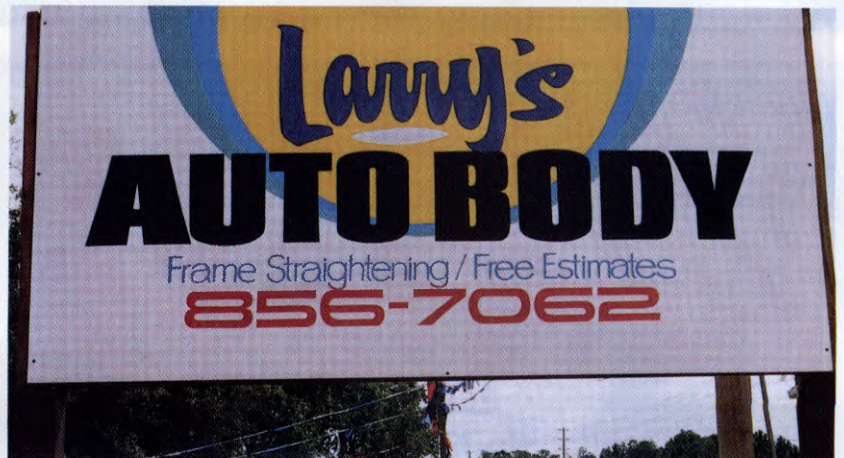
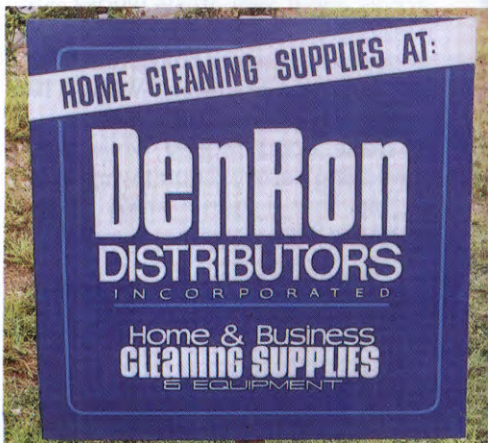


door to them. "I thought that was really cool," says Sam. "You never expect a shop to invite a new shop to move in next door to them. Our markets are really different, though.

They focus on the wood sign market, while most of my work is made up of truck lettering, banners, and other painted signs."

His shop is 450 square feet inside,

with a large covered area outside (about another 400 square feet). "It's pretty small," says Sam, "and I've been feeling that lately. I'd really be out of luck if I didn't have that covered





area out front — it's really great for pulling trucks into, or for lettering large signs or banners under."

Now 22, and having been working on his own for the past three years, Sam is plenty familiar with the difficulties that face a young beginner in the industry. "It hasn't been all peaches and cream. I think the hardest part of starting out is finding someone who is a good sign artist and is willing to teach you. But most of the quality people I've run into [while learning about lettering] are ready to share what they know. They've been very open and helpful."

The other difficulty he encountered was relating to customers. Because of his age, he's often not taken seriously. Sam believes that in some cases, jobs go to older, more experienced sign artists because the customer equates experience with quality.

Lately, Sam has been working on scripts and design. "I've been working on incorporating more script into my layouts. But actually, I guess I'm working on all the different aspects of the trade. It's important to be good at colors, layout, letter forms, and design. I get to do a lot of knockouts here at my shop, and they're great. I think they're the most fun. You can practice and experiment with them — and learn a lot."

Sam hopes to move into a larger shop one day soon. He would like to position himself in a shop large enough to accommodate one or two other sign artists, where he could take on some larger work — sandblasting, for instance. "I don't want to get too big," says Sam. "I've heard plenty of stories about sign artists whose businesses get too big too fast. They lose sight of what they're doing, and it isn't fun for them anymore. What I like about this business is that it allows me to make good money while doing something I enjoy. I don't want to get so big that I don't enjoy myself anymore." □