Member Spotlight

Learning How to Better Bring Life to Granite

The slogan of Artistic Memorials in Perrysburg, Ohio is…"We Bring Granite to Life!" And that they do, along with a little bit of everything else.

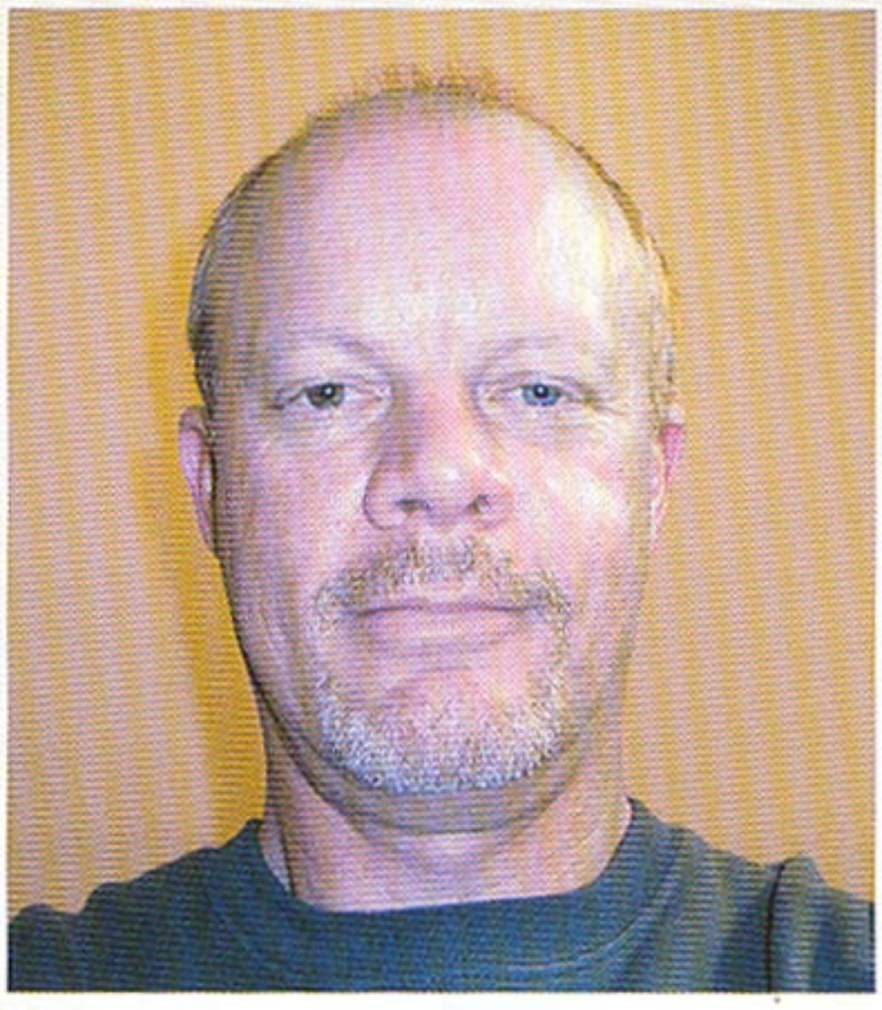
For over six years, Jeff Pettit and his three-man team have developed cemetery monuments, bronze plaques, limestone and granite signage, and new home construction address blocks as well as the engraving of boulders with last names and address information. And even with his 25 years of experience in the business, Jeff says you can never know enough.

"One of my two goals when I started in business was to become a certified memorialist (CM)," says Pettit, who became at CM in August of 2007. "The other was to take the MBNA Correspondence Design Course. I thought both would be a benefit for me and the business.

"I wanted to know the various new aspects of design. I worked for another company for 18 years, but as shop foreman I really didn't do any of the layout or design work. I thought the MBNA course would be a good opportunity for me to gather more information about design."

Artistic Challenge

Pettit started the course in 2005, but was delayed in completing it due to the death of the program's mentor. "We would send these design plates off to Bert Gast and he would grade them, as well as give us feedback on what he thought might work better. While I had all the plates done some time ago, I needed to reinitiate the course due to Bert's death in the fall of 2005.



Jeff Pettit

"But in 2008 I have been officially recorded as having completed the MBNA Correspondence Design Course. The program is back on track, and my passing certificate is pending."

"I simply learned a great deal about monument design in the 11-step program," says Pettit. "During the 33-week course we were asked to complete and send back all assignments within three weeks in order to keep everything moving.

"The goal of the course is to better personalize a monument and to make it unique. The more unique a memorial is for each family, a greater interest is created within the public."

Correspondence Criteria

The objective of the MBNA Correspondence Design Course is to offer a working knowledge of placement, proportion and composition on the stones. It was developed to provide better personal sales opportunities, and to show even the experienced professional how to more personalize a monument for a family.

Whether a novice or an experienced craftsman, the course is also structured to focus on the new different items within the industry. And Pettit says all elements of the 11-step program were of great professional assistance to him.

"On the first plate, I learned a great deal about the primary tools of the trade and studied the different textures of stone," adds Pettit. "We did different things with stippling, polish, steeling and putting two textures together to give the stone a different look.

"In the second step, we used different curves and proportion scales so you can draw shapes and designs to proportion. This included French curves and combining the different textures, such as the polished and stippled steel with the scales."

"The third stage was all about differing perspectives, creating a three-dimensional look," says Pettit. "Instead of looking straight at a monument or specific design, we created a 3-D perspective.

"On plate number four we dealt with landscaping, incorporating some specific designs such as trees and flower cover. This makes the design look much nicer, and proper use ensures that the monument is not overpowered graphically."

People are often willing to spend more money when they realize there is a true difference, that we in the profession truly do know what we are talking about, and that we have good creative and artistic ideas.

"In step number five, we dealt with ornamentation, symbols, and personalizing the monument," notes Pettit. "We learned a great deal about such emblems and where to place them properly.

"On plate six we learned about how to work with a family, and gathering facts by having them describe a person with you--what they did throughout their life. This helped us come up with a specific design based upon personal facts about the individual. And in step number seven, we worked with raised, bronze and copper sculptures."

"In the eighth element, we worked with flowers and floral design, including roses, rosettes, and working on a natural flow," says Pettit. "We wanted to do a little bit more than just sticking them in the

A veteran's memorial in the community of Millbury, Ohio, was designed and built by Jeff and his team.

corner of the stone, and learned to make them flow with the stone.

"The ninth step allowed us to work on various types of engraving, including shaded areas, polished areas, and combining various mediums. These combinations--shading and polished and recessed areas, as well as honed and steeled areas--got us back to more definition in the 3-D perspective, showing us that everything need not just be steeled."

"With step number 10, we worked on different styles of lettering, where to place them, and how to set them correctly on left/center/right margins," says Pettit. "This included a focus on raised letters, whether polished, raised, or steel-raised, and in using different ideas and placement concepts...such as making the first letter much larger than the rest of the text.

"And finally, with plate number 11, we were given a couple of different scenarios based upon family financial requisites. We had to come up with three different designs based upon the cost not exceeding $1,600, not exceeding $6,000, and then with no monetary limit."

Personal Challenge

Is the program worth the effort for an experienced professional? Pettit gives it two thumbs up!

"I've been in the business for 25 years, and there are still things that I picked up in this course that I did not know," he adds.

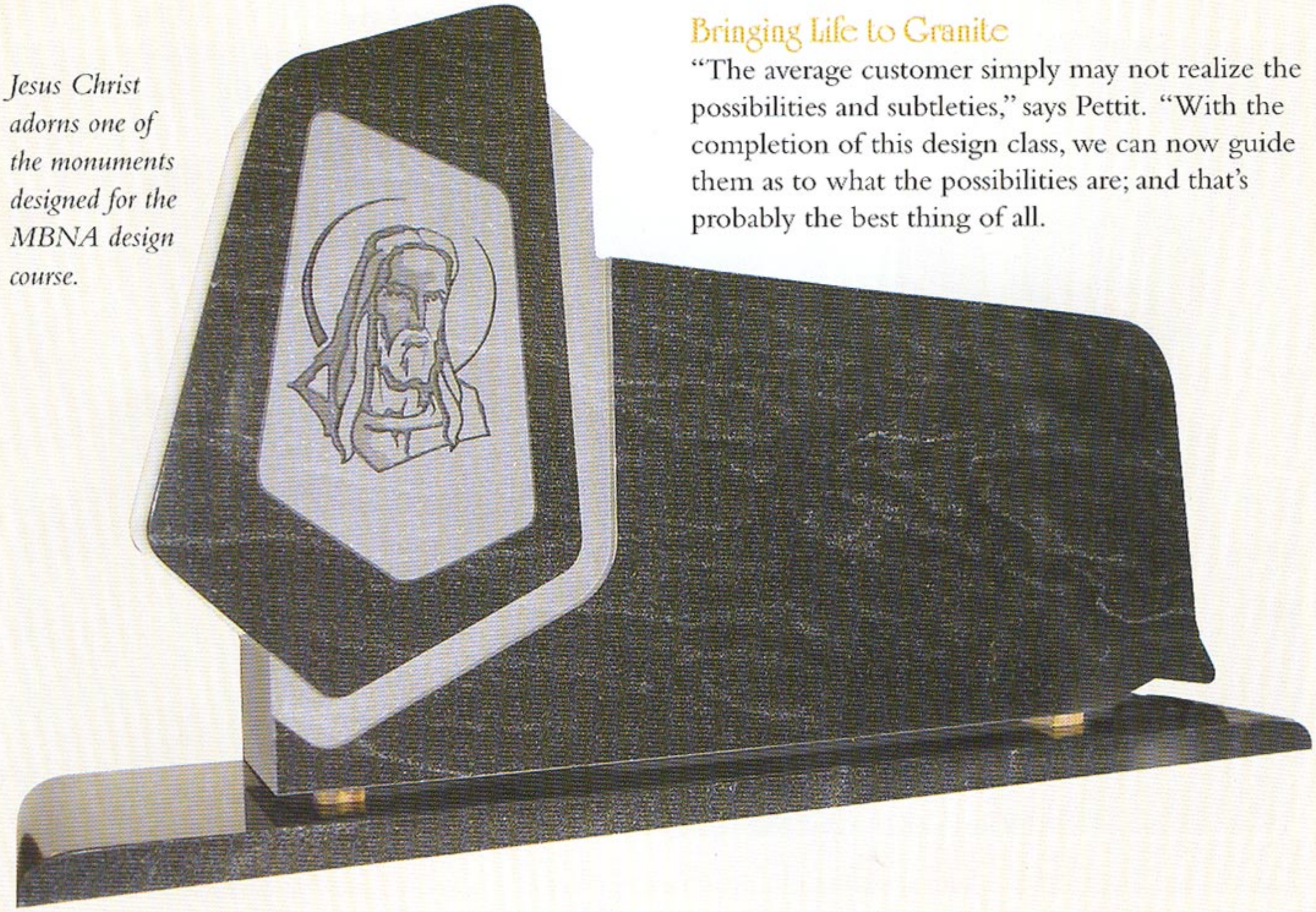
"I did it for a personal challenge, just as I did in earning my CM. And I would recommend it for the neophyte or the experienced person."

"Even if you pick up one or two things off of this effort which you didn't previously know, it is beneficial," says Pettit. "One of the two things that I picked up was about using the different textures. I was aware of the concept, but I picked up different ideas about using them that really helped me and which gives my work a nicer look.

"The second thing I learned was how to better up-sell the different designs and ideas beyond the standard monument. People are often willing to spend more money when they realize there is a true difference, that we in the profession truly do know what we are talking about, and that we have good, creative and artistic ideas."

Bringing Life to Granite

"The average customer simply may not realize the possibilities and subtleties," says Pettit. "With the completion of this design class, we can now guide them as to what the possibilities are; and that's probably the best thing of all.



Jesus Christ adorns one of the monuments designed for the MBNA design course.

"We need to show people that they don't have to limit their selection to a standard, 'cookie-cutter' monument, regardless of budget. I like doing things differently, and I think it's good for the family as well as the industry."

"This course gives us a chance to expand our artistic capabilities a bit more," concludes Pettit. "It lets us bounce different ideas off of the family. Sometimes you may be hesitant to offer a suggestion. But they usually trust our judgment. And I think this course helps us make better judgments and better serve the customers.

"We always received a lot of good feedback after our stones were delivered, which is amazing, as many times you don't hear anything in this business. But we get even nicer feedback now. It lets us know that we're doing a good job, and hearing that is why we are in business." MB

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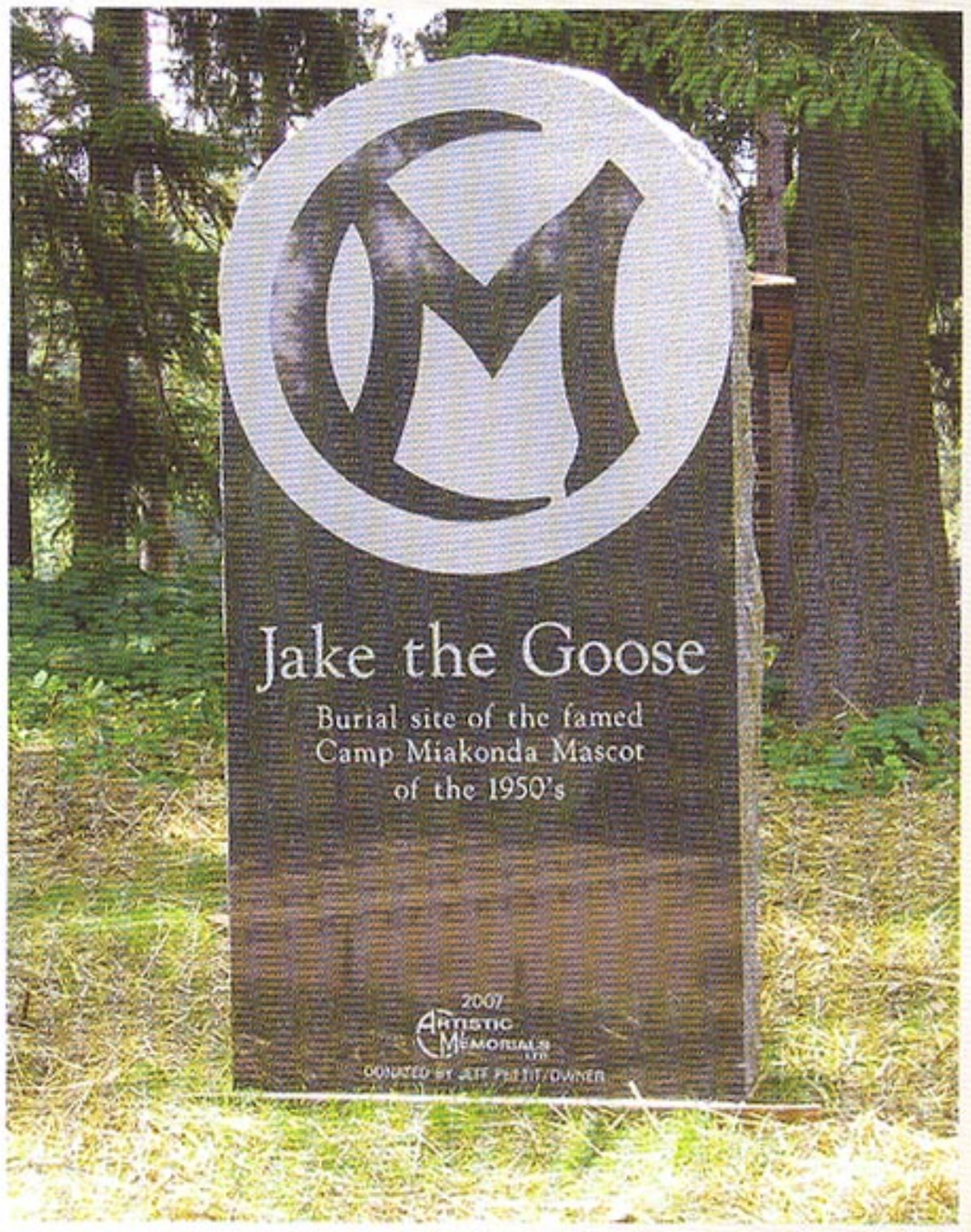

Artistic Memorials designed a memorial for a fallen mascot at Boy Scout Camp Miaconda in Sylvania, Ohio.