

'Mochila' is Bicentennial assignment

By BARRY CLAYWELL

Bill's Saddlery, 621 Messanie, received a Bicentennial assignment from the United States Information Agency in Washington, D.C., recently.

The assignment: To make a full-scale reproduction of a "mochila," or Pony Express saddle bag. Now finished, it is complete with pouches, padlocks and latches just like the originals.

Bill Mooney and his son, Russ, operate the saddlery. There they make saddles, chaps and other special leather equipment. Russ talked about the agency's request.

"The information agency in Washington contacted us," he said, "and asked if we could reproduce the mochila which is on display at the Pony Express Stables Museum."

He said they got the assignment through the St. Joseph Museum. The father and son have repaired the original mochila in the past.

According to the agency order sheet, the finished mochila will be part of a traveling Bicentennial display, "Ways of Life on America's Frontier." Russ said the show will tour Australia, New Zealand, Guam and the Philippines.

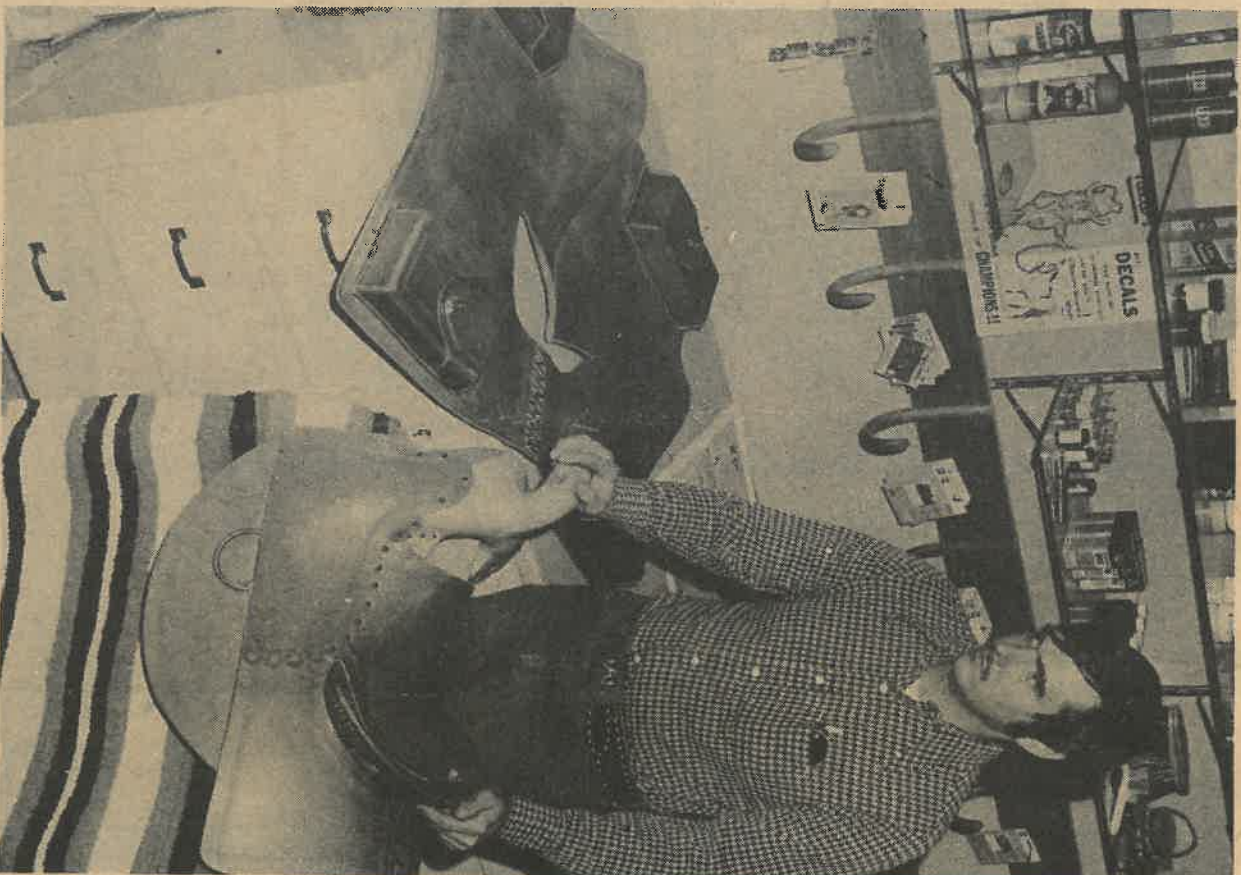
The history of the mochila lies in the early days of the United States Southwest and old Mexico. It was used by American and Mexican riders as a protective part of the saddle. A large piece of leather, it slips over the saddle. Once adopted by the Pony Express, mail pouches were added.

Before they started the job, Russ said they ordered a saddle tree from a Vernal, Utah, firm. A saddle tree forms the basic saddle. It is made of wood and covered with rawhide.

Like original Pony Express saddles, the one the Mooneys built is cut-down. "Their saddles had only the basic parts," Russ said. "They stripped everything off to make it as light as possible. I guess they were like horseshoeing saddles today. They made them light so riders could go faster."

To the saddle tree they added a seat, ground-work, leather housings and skirts.

After the saddle was finished they went to the stables.



The "mochila" at left and a saddle are like those used by the Pony Express riders. Russ Mooney is shown with the made-to-order pieces.



The "mochila" fits over the saddle when used to carry the mail pouches all have latches and padlocks.

News-Press photographs by DO

And firm saddles up with local leather artist

ESTON FILBERT

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Several years ago, the men at Bill's Saddlery at 14th and Messanie streets received an unusual request from a advertising man: translate rather the logo for a cattle

ne. "It wasn't right," said Russ Mooney of the design, and his brother Bill, totally recast the design before filling the order.

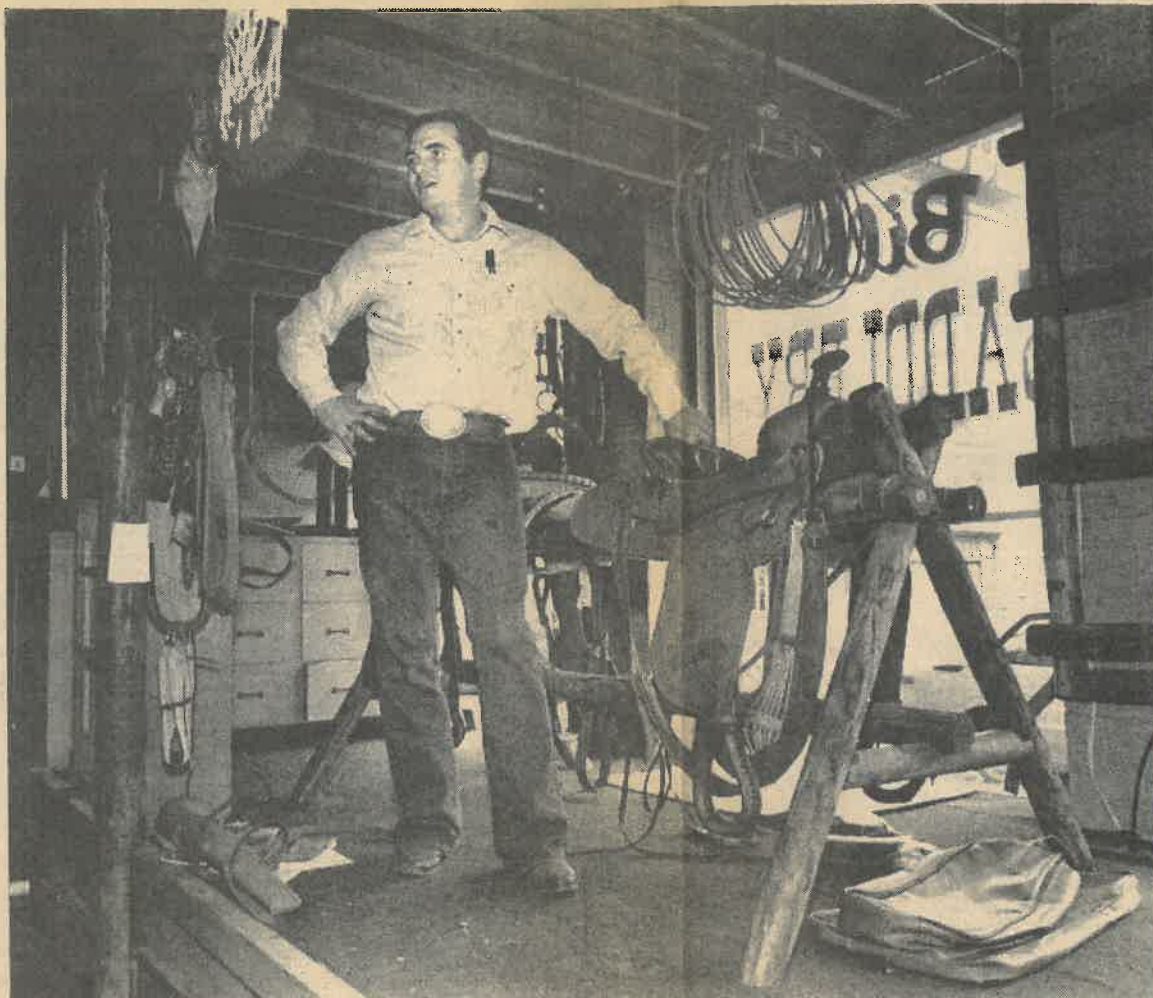
Shearin, owner of Mar-Support Services, contacted Bill on the design, but came away convinced that the leather worker, with 30 years experience turned out the hides into useful and highly decorative pieces of leather. He knew what he was talking

about. "He told me I was wrong and I was right," Shearin said. "I don't meet enough people like him at any more."

In the next few years, Shearin had enough faith in the Mooneys' judgment and skills to have them design other items for his clients. He created the prototype for a leather holster for one animal firm's implanting gun. He also designed the contours of a "hog belt" that appeared in an advertisement for a swine feed additive; it was so popular with producers that it later was reproduced by another goods company and sold at a price given away as a promotion.

Shearin has returned to the business with his tallest custom design four prizes as part of the grand prize in an essay contest sponsored by Purina Mills Inc. for a "complete" horse feed.

Shearin said the idea for the prizes was his, and he brought it to Purina by bringing a product manager into



Staff photo by LAURA EMBRY

Russ Mooney thinks his work for Purina could attract saddle customers across U.S.

the saddlery shop to smell the leather of an Old West business.

"I sold him on giving something personal that is more likely to be appreciated than money," Shearin said. "A saddle is tied to horses and related to their (Purina's) product."

Russ said the order for the saddles, which will be built to the style and measurement

specifications of the winners, came at an opportune time. Because most of his customers are farmers, the current economic slump has reined in the saddle business to a slow walk.

He also said the name of his company in the ads for the contest will probably bring him some inquiries from horsemen around the United States.

He said a customized saddle

generally sells for between \$1,000 and \$13,000.

Because Bill's Saddlery is not equipped to handle mass production, Russ said, individual orders such as the four prizes are best suited for his company.

A year ago, the Mooneys built a replica of a Pony Express saddle for display at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.

INESS / AGRICULTURE

Bill's Saddlery adds to Pony Express theme

ST. JOE TELEGRAPH 1-18-93

When you think of the Pony Express Stables, you think of horses.

So what better business to have next door to the Stables than one that deals with horse supplies.

Bill's Saddlery is located just to the west of the Stables and the new Pony Express National

Saddlery. "It would cost more to improve it than to build new."

"The expansion will bring in tourists," Russ said. The museum already brings in tourists from every state and from foreign countries. More than 40,000 visited the museum last year.

"It helps our business," Russ

said. "Many people who visit the museum are interested in horses. More people come in since we moved here. The move has been good for us.

"We're pleased they are doing this," Russ continued. "More numbers mean more customers."

His father, Bill, who started the business in 1957, still spends time every day working in the shop. He stopped working full-time 10 years ago.

"You have to have a reason to get up," Bill, 72, explained.

We also had to adjust to new styles in saddles. There are big differences in saddles," Russ Mooney said.

Russ said he likes the old type of saddles. "Our saddles go all over the region and the United States."

The business also repairs saddles of all kinds. Many of the most often worn-out or broken parts of a saddle are also the easiest to fix. Many people fix some of those parts themselves, Russ said.

"We fix and make saddles like it was done at the Turn of the Century," he said. "It is in the way we build them. We do what the people say they want in a saddle."

A saddle starts with a bare saddle tree. A visit to Bill's Saddlery reveals a full complement of equipment for making saddles.

"Not many area people know how to repair saddles," Russ said.

"The expansion will bring in tourists...More numbers mean more customers."—Russ Mooney

Bill's Saddlery started and remained for many years at Seventh and Messanie. It moved to its present location in July 1991.

If it has anything to do with horses, Bill's Saddlery has it.

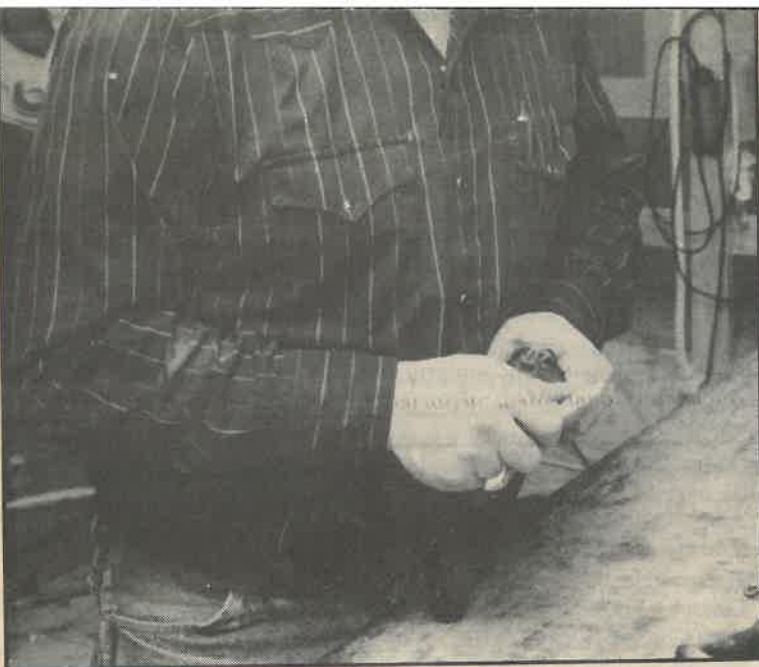
Among the horse and Western items available are Western cups, mugs and cards, saddle soap, belts, all kinds of saddles, bowler ties, buckles, poster-prints, show items.

"Many people sell saddles, but few service them. We do all saddle repair."

If there is a part of their business they do not like so well, it is working with harnesses. They do fix harnesses, but the work is dirty.

"We've both rode horses all our lives," Bill said. "My father worked horses, and I've always been interested in them. Everyone





Russ Mooney, proprietor at Bill's Saddlery, is expert at fixing and making all kinds of saddles and various other horse supplies.

Memorial now under construction.

The expansion of the Stables will add to the collection of Pony Express history at the Museum. The expansion will add back the back half of the Stables which collapsed before it could be saved. It will double the exhibit program space. It also aims to create a new wing to house living history exhibits, visitor facilities, offices and the growing collection of Pony Express artifacts.

Bill's Saddlery occupies the west half of the Pony Express Bowling Lanes. The east half has been destroyed for the museum expansion. But the lanes were built at two different times, and the common wall between the two parts of the bowling alley remains, so it did not affect Bill's Saddlery. The block surface in front of the building was cut for the demolition.

The Bill's Saddlery building is owned by the Pony Express Museum. "Neither half of this building was considered well built enough to be a museum," said Russ Mooney who operates Bill's

saddle blankets, hat savers, gloves, shoe polish, cologne, after shave, leather dye, all purpose cement, mink oil, hoof care kits, leather finish, saddle butter, horns and leathercraft items, zippers, boots, brushes, hair polish, saddle pads, horse magazines, horse shoes, horse show racks and black powder items.

A visitor to the shop may be drawn to the life-size display figure of a horse pulling a real old-time cart, another life-size display figure of a horse and a life-size display figure of a cowboy.

The main business is saddles. Bill Mooney began building custom saddles in 1957, and the business has developed a good reputation in the area. "We now make saddles for the sons and daughters of our customers from that time.

used horses when I was growing up. I often rode to town in the back of an old wagon. I used to help gather cattle, cut bulls and brand cattle."

The first saddles Bill sold were on the back of a horse, he said.

Russ likes horses. "He has three he rides," Bill said. "Russ is a good cowboy. He likes to arena rope."

Russ said there are fewer horses in the area but better quality animals. "There are more activities for horses. I like horses. I like to work with horses and make good saddles for horses."

**story by
Duane Thies
photos by
Jim Fly**



Bill Mooney, Russ' father, is pictured with the items he and Russ repair at Bill's Saddlery. Bill started the shop in 1957 and is proud that Bill's Saddlery fixes and makes saddles and horse equipment the old way. The business draws many horse enthusiasts who come to see the Pony Express Museum.

Metro/

Friday, June 21, 1991 St. Joseph, (

The travelin' man

Allen Seifert
Staff writer



Saddle man to set up shop at museum

After six decades at Seventh and Messanie streets, Bill's Saddlery is moving.

Russ Mooney, long a key figure in historic re-enactments related to the Pony Express, will take his saddle making and tack business to the Pony Express Museum annex, Ninth and Penn streets.

He will become a "living exhibit" for the museum, continuing his leather work under the scrutiny of those who visit the museum.

"Every time a business is moved, it changes a little, so I'm sure we'll have to make a few changes even after we get down there," Mooney says. "But it's a very good opportunity for me, and I'm looking forward to it."

Rich Nolf, curator of the St. Joseph and Pony Express museums, says he's elated by Mooney's move and believes the business will be another attraction for a museum that has seen nothing but steady growth.

"We believe the move will be beneficial for both of us," Nolf says. "He will be an attraction for the tourists who visit, many of whom have their own horses."

ress bowling alley. Mooney will move in July.

The door to the business will open onto Ninth Street. The museum will open to Penn Street.

"I don't know of a museum anywhere which has a saddle maker as a part of its regular displays. It will give the Pony Express Museum something that others just do not have," Nolf says.

Mooney says his involvement with Pony Express Museum dates "way back" and claims a link to the craftsman who designed the mochila for the Pony Express. The craftsman taught Bill Mooney, father of Russ, and Russ learned the craft from his father.

"So, I've always been very interested in the Pony Express and all of the history that goes with it," Mooney says.

"But I'm going to continue making saddles, just as I always have done. Our business won't change that much."

Mooney expects his customers to follow him to the museum.

"Our customers are horse people, and most of our advertising is by word of mouth. I believe (the move) will change our business somewhat, but I won't really know about that until I get down there."

His saddles, he notes, have covered a great deal of territory.

"We've always let our product speak for itself . . . We have saddles along both coasts and in most of the states of the Union," he says.

The saddle maker does a lot of repair work, and plans to continue that work after the move.

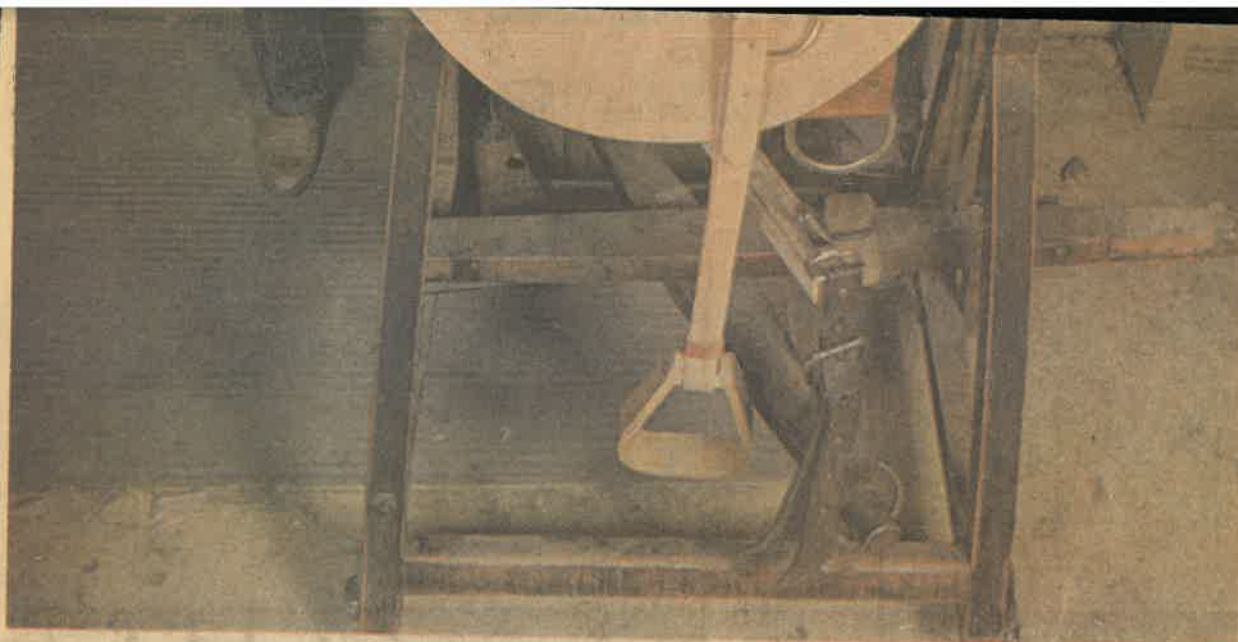
"I think it will take some experimenting to see what works and how it will work," Mooney says.

"I've never been in a tourist area before." However, he says, "Many of the people who come in here are interested in the Old West and western history."

JOSEPH NEWS-

ST. JOSEPH, MISSOURI, WEDNESDAY EVENING, MAY 28, 1986





—Staff photo by IVAL LAWHON JR.

Bill, left, and Russ Mooney with the saddle and mochila they made for the Smithsonian.

Local saddle bound for Smithsonian

By **ALLEN SEIFERT**

Staff Writer

The saddle-making expertise of Bill and Russ Mooney will soon be on display at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.

Part of an exhibit there will be a hand-made replica of what is thought to be an original Pony Express saddle now the property of the St. Joseph museum.

"We think this is unusual because most of the displays at the Smithsonian are the original item of historical significance," said Russ Mooney. "The saddle we're sending is a duplicate of the saddle owned by the Wyeth family and the museum."

The saddle saga began last Fall when the Smithsonian Institute first contacted Museum Curator Rich Nolf about obtaining an original Pony Express saddle.

Nolf directed the inquiries to the Mooneys, suggesting that they might recreate a Pony Express saddle, complete with mochila, especially for the Washington museum.

"We couldn't have done this without the cooperation of the Museum," said Bill Mooney.

Borrowing the Museum saddle, the Mooneys stripped it down to the tree, then sent those dimensions to a saddle tree maker in New Mexico.

The tree maker responded by creating a duplicate of the original in rawhide.

"While we were doing it, we made not one but three — one for the Wells Fargo Museum in Sacramento, Calif., one for the Post Office Department for a historic display, and this one for the Smithsonian," Russ Mooney said.

The Pony Express saddle was, as saddles go, an inexpensive model, stripped of all frills which might make it an ounce or two heavier.

"An ordinary saddle might weigh 45 pounds or so. This saddle will weigh around 20. And it is completely hand-made. All of the nails are either solid copper or solid brass. I would estimate that it took probably 60 man hours to build," said Bill Mooney.

The Mooneys are not certain when the saddle will become a part of a permanent Smithsonian Institute but it will be hand-delivered to the Museum by North American Van Lines.

"We had total cooperation from everyone. North American officials here had to get approval for their national office to make the delivery, but they did it. We built the saddle, but we had help from a lot of people," Bill Mooney said.

Saddles really seat-of-pants business

Russ Mooney's work described as an art.

1-5-99

By FRED KOENIG
fredk@npgco.com
St. Joseph News-Press

Russ Mooney's interest in saddles is nearly genetic.

"My father tried to make cowboys out of all of us, but I'm the only one who stuck," said Mr. Mooney, owner of Bill's Saddlery.

Mr. Mooney's father, Bill, started the saddle business in 1957 at Seventh and Messanie streets. It operated there until 1990, when it moved to its present location at 1205 S. Ninth St.

Mr. Mooney started working with his father in the business when he was a freshman at Central High School. He earned a degree from Northwest Missouri State University and taught business education in Oregon, Mo. But even while he was teaching, he could be found back in the saddle shop on weekends and during summer break.

"I never could get away from the business," he said.

After five years of teaching, Mr. Mooney decided to go into the family saddle business full time. But he has no regrets about his college education.

"College teaches you how to learn," Mr. Mooney said.

But Mr. Mooney's knowledge about saddles didn't come from a book or a class, it came from the seat of his pants.

Mr. Mooney has shown horses, gone on pack trips on horses and even rode bucking broncos in the rodeo when he was younger. When he's not riding, he's building custom saddles for others who enjoy



Business facts

Business Name: Bill's Saddlery

Owner's Name: Russ Mooney

Age: 51

Current location: 1205 S. Ninth St.

Future location: 20496 County Road

Education: Bachelors degree in education from Northwest Missouri State University

Hobbies: Roping, riding, hunting, officiating high school football

Family: Married with one grown son

riding sports, ranging from fancy show saddles to saddles that are used by mule-riding raccoon hunters.

The saddles Mr. Mooney makes usually start at \$1,200 and go up from there. It takes from 80 to 100 hours of labor for him to make most saddles, because he makes and fits all of the pieces himself. The lifetime of the saddles depend on the riders.

"Saddles are like a pair of shoes — how long they last depends a lot on how you use them," Mr. Mooney said.

A good example of someone who really puts a saddle to use would be Greg Clement, auctioneer at the



Russ Mooney, owner of Bill's Saddlery, works at his present location on South Ninth Street.

He will be moving and working out of a shop near his home later this year.

St. Joseph stockyards. The Mr. Clement's father bought a saddle from the Mooney's in 1959, and his family has purchased 23 more since then.

"We use Mooney saddles everyday," Mr. Clement said.

When the saddles leave the ranch for hunting trips they serve the Mooneys' well as advertisements. "I'd be out riding somewhere, and someone will say 'My gosh, where did you get that saddle?'" Mr. Clement said.

Mr. Clement describes Bill Mooney as having a mountain knowledge, and Russ' skills mir-

ror his father's.

"They are both artists, part of a dying breed," Mr. Clement said.

In addition to building saddles, Mr. Mooney also works on other types of leather repair except shoes. His shop also sells some cards and jewelry, but that will soon change.

Soon Mr. Mooney will move to a new location, where he will focus his business back to saddles. He is constructing a building near his home for the business. The new address will be 20496 County Road 306, and he plans to move about the first of February.

Mr. Mooney isn't too worried about losing business during the move. He is about a year behind on building saddles. His father, a World War II veteran, still builds saddles too, but he doesn't take orders.

"He just builds them the way he wants to, and he leaves it up to me to sell them," Mr. Mooney said.

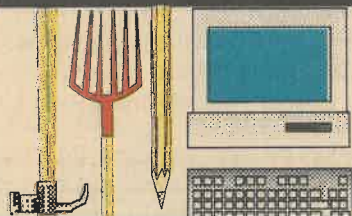
If you have an idea for a business piece, contact business editor Robyn Davis by phone at 271-8573, by fax at 271-8692, by e-mail at robjnd@npgco.com or by mail in care of this newspaper.



Staff photo by LEIGH ANN BRYSON

S T J O S E P H

LEATHER CRAFTSMAN *N.P. 6-21-92*



A T W O R K

Russ Mooney, owner of Bill's Saddlery, 621 Messanie St., measures a piece of leather for a personalized pouch. In addition to saddles, Mooney makes and repairs leather goods such as saddle bags and other items related to horses. Mooney spends 80 to 100 hours on a custom saddle, made to the customer's specifications. Mooney and his father, Bill Mooney, do all of the leather work at the shop.