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Galena Christmas Company has a spooky side

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The Galena Christmas Company features many different Krampus items to celebrate both Halloween and Christmas. Thom Kramer and his son print with the 3D printer.

Kimberley Poe-Jensen, Staff Photos

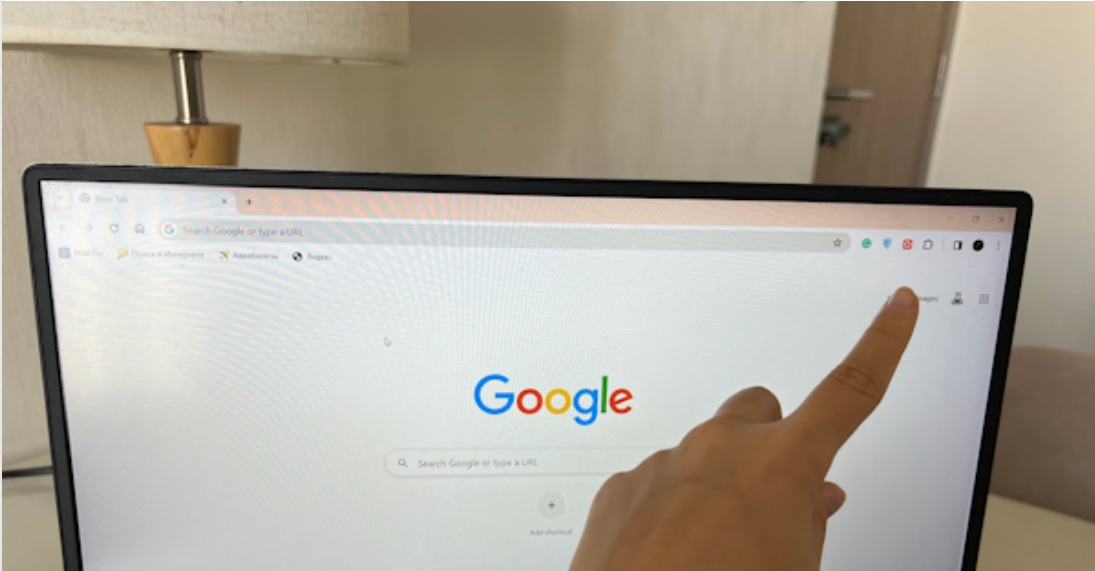
Krampus often rears his ugly, horned head the eve of St. Nicholas Day, Dec. 5. But for some, this character is perfect for Halloween. In fact, if you attend a Halloween festival or parade, you may see someone dressed like Krampus with its goat- and devil-like features. He was originally the scary counterpart to St. Nicholas who, instead of rewarding good behavior, punished children who were bad. Krampus would either swat them with a birch switch or take them

away in a basket or barrel. It originated overseas centuries ago, possibly in Germany and Austria. Now it can be seen in Galena, compliments of Thom and his son, Reese, Kramer of the Galena Christmas Company.

"Krampus has become a lot more popular the last couple years," Kramer said. "People are looking at it as it's Santa's brother; he's got a job to do. He takes care of the naughty kids. He's not evil; he's just an enforcer.

"As time is going on, people are starting to realize that Christmas that we know is the Christmas that Coca-Cola and JCPenney laid out for us," he said. But people are starting to realize there are other holiday traditions that can be celebrated. "All countries have their own stories about how Christmas is celebrated... We just kind of grabbed onto the German," he said, noting his German background.

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Kramer has been in the private investigation industry for 35 years. "But I always had side interests in things like photography.... I'm an arts and crafts kind of guy. I'm not the guy you want to take to a baseball game. However, I have an unusual (knack) of knowing where everything is at in Hobby Lobby," he said, laughing. "I've always been just an artsy kid. That was always my thing."

Prior to moving to Galena with his children in 2019, together they did “celebrity meet-and-greets” in the Chicago area. “We got to do all the photos and print them on the spot. We got to meet some amazing people, from the ‘munchkins’ from the Wizard of Oz to all kinds of people.” But when they moved, he had to find another way to use his creativity, and it was a bonus if he could do it with his children.

“I had had some experience with sublimation printing. That’s a process of where you take inks and, through high heat and pressure, you can put them on different things, i.e., ceramics, mugs, etc.” He thought about what could be the next “side hustle” for him. And when friends visited him in Galena, they often wanted Christmas ornaments, especially if they were locally made. “So, I started thinking, ‘Wouldn’t it be cool to be able to actually make ornaments and holiday-related items right here in our little workshop?’ Let’s see what happens.”

He then made a small run of Galena ornaments and approached Geoff and Alex (Arroyo-Karnish) at the Bakehouse. “They had just recently opened up... They were receptive and said yes,” Kramer said. That’s when he decided to sell Krampus ornaments to the A Darkness Lovely store.

After honing his skills at making ornaments, Kramer decided to make nutcrackers. “It was very labor-intensive,” he said. “We were also doing lanterns. Whatever we thought people might like, we decided to give it a try.” They are also making eight ounce scented candles, which are titled Oktoberfest, Halloween Parade and Luminaria, to represent the events in Galena. “All the candles bear images of Galena,” he said. “My thought at the time was — when people come to Galena, they always want to take a little bit of Galena home with them.”

Eventually, Kramer considered how he could reach a mass audience, instead of just Galena visitors and residents. He then opened an Etsy shop and his spooky items, especially, took off in sales. “People are buying our stuff worldwide,” he said.

Locally, besides the prior two locations mentioned, Kramer sells at Hello Galena Artist Co-Op and does commissioned items for area businesses. His next goal is to get some local artwork on his ornaments. “I want to celebrate Galena artists,” he said.

“My goal with the Christmas Company is this — I’m 58 years old and as I get closer to retirement, I’d like to have something that gives me purpose. Of course, I have my children, and they’ll always give me purpose,” he said. Kramer is pleased with the way things have been going, and he looks forward to growing his business.

"I love the idea of knowing that my ornaments are hanging on someone's Christmas tree and that someone thinks of them as being special... And I like the idea of people giving something to somebody that they think is special. If they really like it, they keep it forever."

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