

The business that started in a box!

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Jeff & Elaine Wallis met as students at Sheridan College while working on the student senate. Both loved to be involved and take an active part in making things happen - *They still do!* Jeff was the Vice President at Sheridan's Heavy Equipment Campus and Elaine was Advertising Director, while studying Commercial Illustration in Brampton. *30 some years later, those roles still haven't changed!*

As fate would have it, they graduated at the height of an economic recession in the early 80's. The job situation was bleak to say the least and finding work in their chosen fields never happened. Jeff found work with a telecommunication company but eventually his department was phased out. Times were tough.

Out of desperation, Elaine took a job as a sign painter for a chain of Italian food markets in Toronto. With no previous sign painting experience she learned the skills by copying the work of the previous sign painter. He had quit the job and left behind his sign kit, a black box filled with brushes, paint and a weird metal pipe with a soft ball at the end. *"I had no idea what that thing was for but it looked important. When I left I took it and the sign box with me. Some time later I saw a photo of Norman Rockwell using a mahl stick to steady his hand when he painted so I decided to give it a try and was instantly hooked. I could never letter again without it!",* Elaine recalls.

In 1983 they left the uncertainty of the job market in Toronto and moved to Jeff's hometown of Niagara Falls. Instead of looking for a job they decided to create their own and **Signature Sign Painting** was born in the basement of their rented home with all the tools of the trade inside that black wooden box!

In those early years before computers, every sign, poster, banner, truck or boat was lettered by hand...mostly my hand" laughs Elaine *"In today's world it's really hard to believe what we did!"*

Over the years as the business grew, the name evolved from **Signature Sign Painting** to **Signature Signs** and today **Signature Sign & Image**. What hasn't changed is the partnership. Jeff & Elaine are still the faces behind the company with son Mark joining the ranks of ownership along with a team of dedicated and talented staff. The company designs, builds and installs everything from simple signs to spectacular full colour digital displays - the portfolio is extensive!

"Getting our name out there and building a reputation of great design, quality workmanship and excellent service didn't happen overnight! We are so proud of our success and so grateful for the support we've received from this community over the past 30 years!" says Jeff.

Mark adds, *"I think the secret to my parents success is building relationships not just building signs. I've learned to live by one important rule "If you succeed ... we succeed."*



Jeff in the spare bedroom office - 1983



Elaine lettering the Maids - 1984