

Stepanski's leather bags featured at AuSable Artisan Village

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DARBY HINKLEY

News Lifestyles Editor

dhinkley@thealpenanews.com



Courtesy Photo Each one of Scott Stepanski's leather bags is handcrafted and unique, like the yellow one seen here.

ALPENA — Alpena artisan Scott Stepanski continues to create unique handcrafted leather bags, which are now featured at AuSable Artisan Village in Grayling.

“Scott creates handmade, hand-stitched leather bags with an incredible dedication to old-world craftsmanship,” reads a Facebook post welcoming Stepanski to the AuSable Artisan Village family. “Each bag is meticulously designed and crafted entirely by hand, showcasing uncompromising quality, detail, and artistry.”

Because they are all made by hand, using no machines, each one is unique.

“Much like the uncommon beauty here on the shores of Thunder Bay, each is one of a kind,” Stepanski states on his website, redbottombags.com. “No two will ever be quite the same.” His company, formerly called Red Bottom Leather, has been rebranded as RBL Handmade Leather Bags.



Scott Stepanski

“I’ve been perfecting my craft over the course of the last few years,” Stepanski said. “I started in 2020 ... I have done a little bit of a rebranding to open the market up a little more.”

He explained how he made a connection with the Grayling gallery.

“I met with one of the committee members of the gallery at the most recent Northern Michigan Fiber Festival at the APlex,” Stepanski said. “So that’s where the connection was made.”

He took a variety of his handcrafted leather bags over to the Grayling gallery on Jan. 11.

“They were impressed with the work,” Stepanski said of the committee members at the gallery. “They don’t have anything in the gallery like mine.”



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He started showing at the gallery this month.

Stepanski explained that the way he makes each one-of-a-kind bag is unique.

“Although there are a few leatherworkers in the northern region, nobody does things quite the way I do,” Stepanski said. “I take more of an artistic approach to my leatherwork.”

He likes to get creative with his designs.

“I like to use vibrant colors, and maybe do things a little differently than other people,” Stepanski said. “Maybe I’ll use oversized zippers as

apposed to what might be standard.”



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Each bag is uniquely handcrafted and built to last.

“They’re generational pieces that can be handed down to different members of the family as time goes on,” he said.

He has updated the designs over the past few years.

“I’ve been listening to a lot of people, and I’ve made some changes in my designs, not only aesthetically, but to make them more durable,” Stepanski said.

He is honored to be an artist at the AuSable Artisan Village.

“I’m very excited to be at the gallery,” Stepanski said.

It takes him 25 hours or more to make one bag.

“I just completed a backpack called The Vortex,” he said. “It took a month to complete. Something like that would take upwards of 50 hours of work.”

His bags were available at Myer’s Fashions in Alpena for nearly two years, but he wanted to see how they would do in a gallery setting.

AuSable Artisan Village is an arts and events destination in downtown Grayling, offering a retail art gallery with over 40 artists, a stage for live performances, and classes and workshops for all ages and skill levels. The art gallery is located at 219 Michigan Ave., Grayling. For more about AuSable Artisan Village, visit artisanvillage.org.