

# Moving rocks

## Granite wholesaler relocates to industrial park

BY BEN ADKINS | STAFF WRITER  
badkins@bizjournals.com

For Ben Hardin, a few years in the Midwest led to business in the Far East.

And Italy. And Brazil.

Hardin and brother Kevin Burk own Axis Granite LLC, an importer and wholesale distributor of granite used for kitchen countertops.

Hardin began to consider chiseling out a career in the granite business while attending Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Okla., where he learned of India's granite trade through a friend from Bangalore.

Burk and Hardin opened Axis in March 2005 in a 5,000-square-foot tobacco warehouse in Shelby County. But business has been so good that they upgraded in March 2007 to a 24,000-square-foot complex in the Bluegrass Research and Industrial Park.

"We felt there was more than enough room for competition in this city," Burk said. "And that has proven to be the case."

### Finding product requires travel

Burk and Hardin travel to several countries to buy slabs of the igneous rock, and soon hope to make their first trip to Africa.

Key for their business, they said, has been to stray from offering only such garden-variety granite options as New Venetian Gold and Uba Tuba. Instead, they buy more "fun" and "exciting" colors, such as Iron Red, Carmello Sedna and Snake Brown.

"We bring in colors and materials that,

two years ago, people wouldn't even think about putting in their kitchens," Hardin said.

Kristin McDonald, co-owner of New Albany-based McDonald Marble & Stone Inc., an Axis customer of about two years, agrees.

McDonald Marble also imports granite, as well as fabricating and installing granite countertops. But McDonald said that if her business doesn't have a particular granite, customers are referred to Axis.

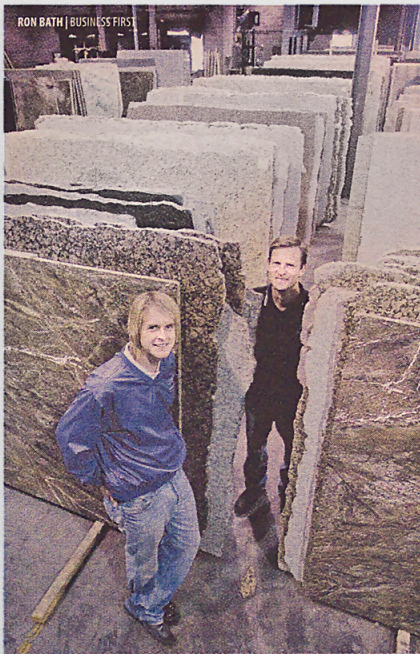
"They do have a lot of exotic stones," she said. "Along with some regulars as well."

Axis' new location, at 10501 Bunsen Way, has nearly 2,000 square feet of office space and about 22,000 square feet of warehouse. Or, as Hardin calls it, a "well-lit, organized indoor showroom."

There, customers can peruse the company's granite selection, enlisting the help of an Axis employee to help them match what will be their kitchen countertop to their cabinet samples and wallpaper or paint scheme — whatever their flavor might be.

"Some people like unusual, wild movement and unusual colors," Hardin said. "Some people like very consistent, not very

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### AXIS GRANITE LLC

**Description:** Wholesale distributor of granite for kitchen counters

**Owners:** Ben Hardin (pictured, from left) and Kevin Burk

**Address:** 10501 Bunsen Way

**Employees:** Seven, with plans to hire two or three more within a year

**Web site:** [www.axisgranite.com](http://www.axisgranite.com)

**Phone:** 493-1574 |

A suffering real estate market has slowed business for some builders and developers, but not for Axis.

With housing starts down, Burk said, many consumers are electing to remodel their existing homes. This might include a kitchen update, he said, and, consequently, a new granite countertop.

"Even in a housing market downturn, our business has grown."

### The right site

Despite their success, a relocation to Louisville was needed, the brothers said.

"For some strange reason, people would not leave Jefferson County to come to Shelby County to look at granite," Burk said.

And because it is so well-known, the East End industrial park was the most logical location, they said.

They looked at several sites, Burk said, settling on the one that "represented the best function for the price."

That location happened to be very near competitor Global Granite & Marble LLC, at 10300 Bunsen Way.

But Burk said that being close to a competitor hasn't hurt.

"We have gained market share in the Jefferson County area, just simply because of where we're located." |

flashy, monotone colors. Every person is different."

### Growth continues for company

Revenue for Axis grew by about 150 percent during its first year of business, Burk said. The company gained another 75 percent in year two and anticipates another 40 percent to 50 percent growth this year.