

# The Brandon Gazette

Home | Around Town | Business News Tips | Business Directory Schools Sports | Organizations Events Calendar | Editorials | Entertainment | Expert

[Home](#) | [Around Town](#) | [The Midsummer Knight's Dream](#)

**G. Fried**  
FlooringAmerica



**Caryl Nolan, Realtor**



Center Place - Brandon

## The Midsummer Knight's Dream

Written by Karly Kehres

In more ways than one, Bob Walker is a knight in shining armor.

Walker is the 48-year-old master puppet-maker, owner and namesake for his shop, [The Midsummer Knight's Dream](#), where he and his team of five handcraft puppets for sale at medieval and Renaissance fairs, conventions and stores across the world.

His shining suit of armor consists of a red zip-up hoodie, jean pants and black sneakers, and the crown around his bare head is one of graying brown curls in lieu of gold and gems.

The table at which for the past 28 years he has created these puppets, called Woodbabies, is square, not round, and despite their name, not all of the puppets are made of wood.

Woodbabies are the “creatures from the woods” which Walker, the Midsummer Knight, has set out to find homes for, at the request of the Queen of Faerie, to save them from the evil Mondane — or so is “The Story” of his own authorship posted on the shop’s website.



The Mondane represents the mundane steel and concrete of most people’s everyday lives that Walker strives to prevent with the creation of the Woodbabies.

“There’s a saying that stuck with me a long time: ‘Let wonder move you as it moves the world,’” Walker said. “And that’s kind of what we try to do here. A lot of people have no wonder in their lives.”

Most Woodbabies are composed of a two-part epoxy clay, and are cast in urethane and silicon molds. More intricate details are executed through either pressure casting or hand sculpture. The individual body parts, which are stockpiled in cardboard boxes and plastic buckets of all sizes throughout the artistically cluttered workshop, are then tumbled in a cement mixer full of sand for thorough smoothing.

The team — consisting of “Master Bob;” Cyndie the “Shop Maven;” her husband, Jeremy; Jeremy’s mother, Susan; and Claude, a former Georgia Pacific employee whose eyes have recently been opened to the world of puppet-making — paints and constructs the parts into creatures, inserts hand-blown glass eyes, adheres feathers and fur as necessary and crafts facial expressions based on the individual’s mood at the time, and Woodbabies are born.



Depending on the intricacy of the puppets’ details, Walker and the team make anywhere from two to 60 puppets a day, working weekdays, and usually taking off weekends for personal time or to travel to fairs and conventions. At this year’s Hoggetown Medieval Faire, The Midsummer Knight’s Dream sold about 300 Woodbabies. For fairs farther away, like the Scarborough Renaissance Festival in Texas or the Bristol Renaissance Faire in Wisconsin, it continually ships Woodbabies to remain stocked with 15 of each of the 25 standard designs.

Although he is known for his marionette control design, he is the opposite of a puppeteer, who constructs puppets through complexity.

“Simplicity. Ease of design. Comfortable to wear. And for me, it’s that sense of ‘what if?’” Walker said. “What if it were real? Could it be?”

Thunderclap, the first puppet he made, is a bizarre creature lacking any roots to traditional myth, with a round head, owl’s beak and huge light blue eyes that light up “like you’re looking into the universe.”

Most of the Woodbabies that aren’t made to resemble real animals like lions, wolves, parrots, owls and the most-popular monkeys are based on Walker’s own interpretation of Celtic or Scandinavian myth, legends, conversations or, like

Search

Search for articles he

**NEW IM**  
GENERAL & COSM  
DENTISTRY





Thunderclap, his imagination.

Nightmares, a popular design, are mythical horses that traditionally bring bad dreams. Woodbaby Nightmares adorned in flames, instead fend them off, keeping their owners safe.

To buy a Woodbaby is to adopt it.

“When I first started, I wouldn’t even call them puppets,” Walker said. “I made homes for souls.”

But Walker shelters souls in more than the framework of puppets.

His adoptions, Moscato, Denver, CiCi, Comet and Cocoa Bean, are his “babies.” They are not Woodbabies, but “hard-luck” greyhound dogs.

The pack is composed of the surviving five of 10 abused greyhounds that Bob and his wife, Courtney, have adopted throughout the past 10 years.

When he sits on the couch, it’s not unusual to find Denver on his left, CiCi on his right and Comet and Cocoa in his lap. But if he flicks his wrist too quickly, Comet soars like his namesake to the corner. Denver’s seat is barely worn-in, and CiCi limps to her place because they had been confined to cages 24/7 for years — CiCi’s a mere 14 inches by 9 inches, smaller than the length of her body — which left Denver averse to affection until about a month ago, and CiCi deformed.

“Greyhounds are companion animals,” Walker said, “and some people just can’t handle that.”

Walker and his wife adopted their first greyhound, Laces, 13 years ago. They then adopted Vinnie from a rescue at a South Florida Renaissance festival to be his companion. The full-size dog had been abused, and died from a heart condition that no one knew about.

Moscato and Annie, born with a cleft palate, followed shortly after. Annie needed to be tube-fed, and her adoption is what put the Walkers on the map as go-to adopters for hard cases.

“One of the first things we teach them is not to chew the puppets,” Walker said. “But they are sight hounds, so if it moves...”

Walker compared his connection with the greyhounds, to his customers and their Woodbabies.

“People become so attached to them it’s unbelievable, and it blows my mind every day,” he said. “But when you have the love of a tiny greyhound, there ain’t nothin’ like it.”

Walker brings the greyhounds to the shop on a regular basis, one of the many benefits that attracted the help of his shop maven three years ago, after he had spent several years single-handedly liberating the Woodbaby population.

“I was doing the thing I really enjoyed to do, but after a while I had no life. This was all it was: the puppets, the Woodbabies,” he said. “I love them to death but I need a break too.”

Cyndie the Shop Maven entered the plaza behind the wheel of a lunch truck, and left with a bag of feathers and Woodbabies. She began doing piecemeal work on Woodbaby wings to pay for two Christmases for her sons.

When the full-time position became available, she jumped at the opportunity to use her strong time management and marketing skills, something that Master Bob, as she enduringly labeled him, lacks. She dubbed herself “shop mistress,” and jumped headfirst into the business side of The Midsummer Knight’s dream.

“We’re a really good complement to each other,” she said. “He has really helped me become a much stronger woman, and I’ve helped him become a better businessman versus just an artist.”

But where he was strong, she was weak and lacking self confidence due to an abusive relationship with her children’s father.

Walker took her in, the way he seems to with every soul in need. Cyndie left the abusive relationship, and with Walker’s help, discarded her previous title of shop “mistress,” which to her denoted a sense of dependence, in favor of “maven.”

“I think ‘mistress’ kind of evokes that I need a man to help me get through, whereas a maven does not,” she said. “A maven can stand on her own two feet.”

About two years after Cyndie began working at the shop, her husband, Jeremy, joined the team, when he had to leave the roofing business for health reasons. Having grown up a shy boy from the swamp, Jeremy had never expected to travel cross-country to renaissance fairs for a living.

“I didn’t even know there were other places like the Hoggetown Medieval Faire,” Jeremy said. “And Bob’s one of the best people I’ve ever worked for. I don’t really look at him as a boss. If you need him to do something, he’ll do it.”

For Bob Walker, providing his co-workers a place to work that is, to them, almost a fairytale in itself, is like adopting his greyhounds, and finding homes for his Woodbabies — he loves to do it.

“We’re kind of a team here and kind of a family, and we treat the customers the same way: as part of the family,” Walker said. “I am the Midsummer Knight. This is my dream.”

Copyright © 2018 The Brandon Gazette. All Rights Reserved.  
[Joomla!](#) is Free Software released under the [GNU/GPL License](#).