



A special image can be given a unique venue thanks to two area firms.

Treasured photos preserved on pillows

The shift from film to digital cameras has ushered in a new era of instant gratification: You can snap a picture and self-publish or e-mail it to 20 friends in just a minute or two. But too often, images languish, unseen and sometimes forgotten, in a desktop folder or on a memory card. Through Birmingham Michigan's SmArt Leather Designs and its Bloomfield Hills-based online retail partner, Big Hug, it's easy and fun to give photos and other digital images a new spot in the home, by placing them on a custom leather pillow.

These pillows are made possible by a revolutionary new digital printing technology that infuses images into leather with a reproduction quality unlike anything ever seen before. Whether there's a baby to celebrate, or a moment in time to remember, these personalized pillows make truly memorable keepsakes.

Unlike traditional transfers, this is a permanent process, and images will not fade, scratch off or wear off over time. The technology behind it is the result of over eight years of research and more than two dozen patents worldwide.

"The applications are limitless. Images can be photographs, corporate logos, monograms, texts, graphics — patterns or solid colors, etc. If you can conceive it, we can create it," said Kathy Campbell, Birmingham resident and owner of SmArt Leather Designs. "By harnessing this new technology, we are able to create one-of-a-kind treasures that you really have to see — and touch — to believe. Leather is very tactile, and these pillows have the capacity to become real works of art."

What began as a labor of love — creating a single leather pillow in remembrance of Campbell's beloved Cavalier King Charles spaniel, Reesie, has evolved into a thriving business that allows consumers to easily build their own custom pillow online by uploading graphics or a photo, choosing a size, and in some instances, selecting coordinating fabric (including the option for Sunbrella on a new line of

outdoor pillows) and trims. In the near future, Campbell plans to expand to include a line of custom leather-wrapped photo albums and other home accessories.

Pillows may be purchased through Big Hug, an online provider of remembrance and sympathy gifts. Katie Kiyo, owner of Big Hug said, "This concept comes at a time when we are searching for alternate uses for digital photographs, and artistic ways of keeping memories alive. In addition, it speaks to the design industry's trend toward personalized home décor. To date, Kathy and I are finding that this leather innovation is being used to create pillows for a wide variety of purposes — from purely unique and decorative one-of-a-kind creations for the home, to those commemorating a celebratory event and even pet remembrance, where it all began."

Visit www.bighugllc.com, or call (248) 594-1560.