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Specialty: scale homes – for birds

By Mark Baker
The Register-Guard

EUGENE (AP) — Two men in red T-shirts that say "Keep calm and garden on" are standing in Ron Coble's garage and staring in wonder. "Yeah, that's a cool-looking thing," says Stuart Leaton, general manager at Gray's Garden Center. "You don't see that everywhere." Or anywhere.

There are plenty of birdhouses in this world — but these are more like bird condominiums.

Leaton and Colter Lodestein-Riel, a hard-goods buyer for Gray's, are here at Coble's home, on the eastern fringe of the Fern Ridge Wildlife Area, to inquire about selling Coble's unique creations in their Eugene store.

"This is beyond hard goods," Lodestein-Riel says. Coble, 70, has been building his elaborate bird homes for years, mostly giving them as gifts to family and friends. "He should have them all in my yard and stop giving them away, that's what I think," his wife, Connie Coble, says jokingly.

Ron Coble has been building things all of his life. A long-retired general contractor, Coble did so well in that business in Phoenix, Arizona, years ago, that he says he was able to retire at (not a typo) 27.

Back then, he says, he had a crew of 300 working for him, building homes by the score.

So something as simple as a birdhouse isn't much of a challenge, Coble says. It's just fun.

"I just get the enjoyment of doing it," says Coble, whose looks and gravelly voice are reminiscent of singer and actor Kris Kristofferson.

"If I'm not doing that, I volunteer down at the church (New Hope International) or the Eugene Mission.

"I don't really know of something I can't build," he adds. "I'm just blessed that way."

Coble says he built his first birdhouse in Phoenix about 35 years ago. He had just finished building a home for a friend.

The house had a swimming pool and beautiful redwood decks. Coble was

inspired to build a birdhouse to accompany the rich grains of that deck.

He and Connie, high school sweethearts who married at 18, moved to Oregon in 1982. They bought 90 acres near Fisher Road and Royal Avenue, where for years they raised cattle.

They sold most of the property about a decade ago, except for a couple of acres on the far west end. There, Coble built a home of stone and corrugated metal.

With time on his hands, he built another birdhouse, and then another and another and a few more after that.

Two of them greet you on either side of the gravel driveway that ends after a lengthy trip from the end of Royal Avenue.

Birdhouse pieces are strewn all over a table in his garage that is large enough to fit his 43-foot-long recreational vehicle.

"Once you get all the parts cut, you've just got to put them all together," Coble says.

He says he has no blueprint for these birdhouses. And he has never been particularly drawn to birds.


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