

# Local woodworkers share talents and projects

By Sue Stafford  
Correspondent

Standing in a well-equipped workshop, two retired mechanical engineers extolled woodworking as a fun hobby and productive pastime.

Dennis Mills, with 40 years as a woodworker under his belt, and Rich MacConnell, a relative newcomer to the craft, discussed the Sisters Area Woodworkers (SAW), a group of 76 members who all share a love of crafting projects from wood.

They meet the first Tuesday of each month from 7 to 9 p.m. in members' shops.

Member Terry Ferguson said, "My favorite thing is seeing other members' shops and the projects that they do."

"I'm impressed by the woodworking equipment that is in most of the shops where our meetings are held. These men and, yes, women, are without a doubt serious woodworkers," added Ren Broomhead.

All levels of experience and abilities are welcome.

"I am amazed at the expertise and ability of so many in this area to build such incredible items," added Broomhead.

Chris Frazier, who has completed a four-year carpentry apprenticeship and graduated to journeyman carpenter, explained, "There is great satisfaction in designing and building something from raw wood and seeing the beauty of wood grain patterns come to life in the finished product."

Stephen Baer, a professional woodworker, offered some advice. "As for new or beginning woodworkers, I would at least recommend that he or she attend a few meetings before spending time, energy, and money on any materials. Woodworking can be expensive, dangerous, and extremely rewarding at different times. The SAW group can help moderate the negative aspects while enriching the positive aspects."

Ferguson concurred with Baer, saying "I would encourage anyone who is interested in woodworking to attend a meeting, meet new people, and see if they find some value for themselves."

SAW grew out of Central Oregon Woodworkers (COW) in Bend two years ago when members from Sisters grew tired of the drive to Bend for meetings. They started with 15 members and now have 76 people on the rolls, with 15-20 people at most meetings, a majority of them retirees.

Mills, who served as the head of the COW group, has informally taken on the role of "chief" for SAW. He stressed that SAW has no dues, no officers, no bylaws, and it has a big social aspect.

"There is nearly always a lively discussion that can continue into a social conversation after most of the official business portion of the meeting is complete," said Baer.

Whoever hosts the meeting gets to determine what kind of project they will do. They have made mallets, marking gauges, oval Shaker boxes, cam clamps, and have learned to use the Beall wood-buffing system and a router dovetail jig, among any number of other projects.

For each meeting, members are encouraged to bring something for "show and tell," whether a finished product or under construction.

SAW has carried on a project that began four years ago with the COW group, in conjunction with the Touchmark Retirement Community — making toys for at-risk children for Christmas. The woodworkers build cradles, dump trucks, and biplanes out of wood and take them into Touchmark in mid-October, where a cadre of residents does the finish sanding, staining or painting, and applying decals and hand-painted

details. Other residents make little cradle quilts, some hand-embroidered or cross-stitched, and add a baby doll with handmade clothes to complete the cradle. When everything is complete, each toy is wrapped in clear cellophane and topped off with a bow.

The woodworkers are invited to Touchmark to see the finished products before they are distributed to five different local agencies working with at-risk children. Mills said they have received letters from parents thanking them for what is their child's only toy.

The first year they just used whatever wood they had sitting around. The next year Mills created kits for them to assemble. Touchmark has offered to pay for the materials but SAW members don't want to be reimbursed. For the coming Christmas, Hardwood Industries of Bend will be donating all the wood for the cradles and biplanes. Poplar is the wood used because it is an inexpensive hardwood and takes paint and stain nicely.

In addition to their monthly meetings, special workshops are conducted to work more in-depth on special projects. In one that lasted over several months, seven members made Nicholson work benches, based on an



PHOTO PROVIDED

Sisters woodworkers make toys for at-risk children.

original 1830s bench that is able to hold wood for cutting and planing without an attached vice.

Mills is credited by other members with bringing SAW into being. David Hiller indicated that Mills "was instrumental in bringing this to fruition."

Ferguson added, "Under Dennis Mills' leadership and the talented woodworkers

in Sisters, the group has flourished."

"The best thing about the Sisters Area Woodworkers group is the people. They are a generous group of individuals with a willingness to share their skills and artistic talents with everyone," summed up Hiller.

For more information about SAW, contact Dennis Mills at 541-639-6216.

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