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Shop helps clocks keep time

MOUNT VERNON, Wash (AP) — Time assumes new meaning in Raymond Slater's tiny clock repair studio.

"If you're in a hurry, you're in the wrong shop," he said.

His small work bench is covered with a terry cloth towel and surrounded by even smaller tools and nearly microscopic replacement parts. His latest project sits on another bench to the side.

"I taught that clock some new words when I was working on it," he said.

The clock ticks minus its faceplate and casing. It looks more like a moving jumble of brass gears mounted on a wooden frame.

Slater explained this American-made timepiece from the turn of the century requires more adjustment.

It will sit on his bench among others ticking away until he is satisfied with its performance.

The discipline is so intricate he uses head mounted magnifiers, tiny metal implements and a jeweler's lathe to carve metal pivots down to .008 inch.

Slater has some 60 dusty clocks stacked in the forefront of his showroom that he has yet to start on. Many are invaluable, family heirlooms passed down generations. Each has a story. A majority appear to originate in the 19th Century.

"I've been found," he said. "People know I'm here."

Slater retired after 26 years in the Navy. There, he worked on jet engines and honed his talent for

perfection and intolerance for substandard effort. "When you work on jet engines you can't make a mistake," he said. "You literally had a man's life in your hands."

A skilled clock repair and restoration person can always find work, said Brian Varner, a master clock maker at the Broadway Clock Shop in Seattle. He said there are a smattering of good people in the business. He also said one of reputation will be sought out by discriminating antique clock owners.

Dave Chapman, owner of the Olde Time Shop in Sedro-Woolley, echoed the sentiment.

"A good shop is hard to find and a lot of people are pretty particular about their clocks," he said.

Unlike Slater, Chapman said he prefers cuckoo clocks. Slater said he likes the precision of a grandfather, mantle or ship clock to the cuckoo.

Demand for clock makers, whatever their preference, is likely to continue. Clock collecting is an international passion, said Roseann Robinson, spokeswoman for the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors Inc. Her group has 37,000 members and is growing steadily, she said.

Varner said demand has made antique clocks rarer and increasingly valuable.

Slater said he prefers older clocks. He pointed out an eight-day mantle clock, circa 1870-1880, and said he looks forward to returning it to health.

"It's super rewarding to me when one responds," he said. "This is high excitement for me. You watch the first movements of restored life."

Bald eagle nursed to health, released

ALOHA (AP) — A bald eagle nursed back to health after it was found near death in a Washington canyon has been returned to the wild.

The four-year-old raptor was found about three weeks ago near a deer carcass in the Rock Creek Canyon near Goldendale, Wash., by a Washington Fish & Wildlife biologist.

The bird was turned over to the Portland Audubon Society which, in turn, gave it to the Rock Creek Veterinary Hospital in Aloha.

Katherine Weil, director of the Audubon's Wildlife Care Center,

said the eagle was believed to have eaten poison, but tests conducted by the hospital were inconclusive.

The eagle, dubbed Roosevelt, weighed only five pounds when found and nearly 11 pounds when released Saturday after being fed a steady diet of smelt and mice.

Volunteers wanted to name him Clinton after the president, but he was too feisty, Weil said, so he was named after President Teddy Roosevelt, a noted conservationist.

Audubon volunteers spent a

week exercising the bird on a 150-foot long line, getting a good workout themselves by running along beneath it for hundreds of yards.

Weil said the Audubon Society handled seven bald eagles this year, far more than usual. Three were nursed back to health and released.

Oregon had 221 nesting bald eagle pairs this year, the highest number since an annual census began in 1979. The bird is listed as a threatened species in Oregon, Washington and Idaho, and is endangered in most other states.

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