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Chip off the old block —

NWI promotes woodworking

Text and Photos
By RACHEL LAKE
Feature Writer

An intricately carved train rests atop a bridge complete with railroad tracks, lights and a signal. With its detailed carvings and impressive design, the train ensemble appears realistic. This ensemble represents the masterful work of George Pluard, a Munster resident.

Pluard first became exposed to woodworking nearly 20 years ago at River Oaks Center in Calumet City. During a trip to the shopping center, Pluard came across a man selling custom signs out of wood. Intrigued, Pluard decided to try his hand at woodworking. Shortly after taking up the craft, Pluard became one of the founding members of Northwest Indiana Woodworkers Association.

Consisting of 100 members, NIWA is dedicated to sharing and improving woodworking skills. NIWA members carve anything from miniature bureaus and airplanes to animal models to religious paraphernalia. Members meet on a monthly basis to exchange ideas, present carvings and plan special events. The association organizes field trips, picnics and tool auctions.

Members also serve the community. Each Christmas, for example, they distribute handmade toys to needy children through local organizations. These toys

include baby doll cribs, autos and rocking horses. In 2005, members constructed 1,068 toys for needy children throughout northwest Indiana.

Members also visit one another's shops to gain incite on equipment and effective work area layout. Pluard said members expand knowledge through social activities like this one. "The biggest resource is exchange of ideas, we learn from one another," he explained. Pluard added members have the opportunity to develop lifelong friendships with those who share the same interests. NIWA also maintains audiovisual/book and magazine libraries where members may research information at their convenience.

Pluard said woodworkers tend to specialize in certain artistic areas. Pluard has a particular talent for creating intarsia. As stated on www.intarsia.com, "intarsia is a mosaic of wood fitted and glued into a wooden support, popular in 15th century Italy for decoration." Throughout Pluard's home, mosaics of animals, people and other depictions hang on the walls. When choosing wood, Pluard considers what colors are necessary for the design. He frequently uses cedar for its versatile color scheme. Sometimes, however, Pluard paints projects. In these cases, the natural color of wood is irrelevant. After preparing wood pieces, Pluard then lays them down on solid wood.



STARTING A NEW PIECE — George Pluard is shown starting a new piece for carving inside his shop. Pluard is one of the founding members of Northwest Indiana Woodworkers Association. Consisting of 100 members, NIWA is dedicated to sharing and improving woodworking skills.

He raises and lowers pieces to emphasize shape.

Besides mosaics, Pluard also creates furniture pieces like shelves and tables. Pluard is fond of renovating old pieces. For example, Pluard once converted an old door into a desktop. Other creations include bookends, a toy chest and changing table. Pluard said woodworking provides an escape from the stresses of the real world. "It's a very good hobby," he said. "You forget about everything else."

NIWA welcomes men and women of all ages. NIWA meets the fourth Thursday of the month at 7 p.m. except in November and December. In November and December, meetings are held the third Thursday of the month at the same time. From August through May, meetings are held at Clifford Pierce Middle School, 199 East 70th Place, Merrillville. In

June and July, meetings are held at Hidden Lake Park in Ross Township (Merrillville). For more information about

NIWA write to P.O. Box 271, Schererville, IN 46375 or visit www.lakenetnwi.org/member/woodworkers/.



JUST SOME OF HIS WORK



WORKS OF INTARSIA — Pluard creates works of intarsia where wood pieces, area placed on solid wood, with the artist raising or lowering pieces to emphasize shape.



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