

# BAKER, JOHN

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HENRY  
BURY  
Intelligencer

John Baker has every reason to wake up each morning.

As 'The Hired Hand', he has clients depending on him to cut their grass, clean their eavestroughs, do minor household repairs and even clear their snow-filled driveways.

His love of hockey — and his athletic talent — keeps him on the ice five and sometimes six times a week, including tournaments with the Belleville McFarlands Oldtimers team.

And whatever spare time he can muster is spent creating something special in the woodworking shop he built behind his Boswell Street home and being a companion to his dog and two cats.

If anything, the 69-year-old Baker and former CN Express employee is too busy to accomplish everything he wants to in life.

"My snowmobile hasn't moved for the past three or four years and my boat hasn't moved in two years because with my business, I just don't have the time," Baker said.

"But I'd rather be busy. And I'm happy when I'm busy."

His desire to stay active is rooted in his outlook on life.

"Wouldn't it be boring to wake up in the morning and have nothing of interest or nothing at all to do. If you work hard and keep active, then you can do things a lot longer in your life," said Baker, who earned the nickname "Shaker Baker" as an elementary student and it has stuck for the past six decades.

"Most people don't know my birth name. They know me as Shaker," he laughed.

The lifelong Belleville resident learned three important lessons in life when he was 12 years old and started working in his father's fruit market on Front Street.

"Work hard. Pay your own way. And save a little bit for a rainy day. I'm proud to have been able to do all three in my

life," he said.

Baker worked in the family fruit market after school, Saturdays and the summers until it closed in 1953 — the same year he graduated from Belleville Collegiate Institute. He then embarked on a 35-year delivery career with CN Express.

When the company was sold to private interests and eventually went into receivership in 1988, Baker suddenly found himself out of work.

"It was depressing to lose your job after that long. I found myself with nothing to do. I have always been an active person and I decided I had to find something to do," said Baker, who was 53 at the time.

About a year later, a friend asked Baker to do a drywall repair and cut her grass. Through word of mouth, other people were