

Judge. Neil

# Flying on a different

# stage

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Not having a university education lifted Neil Judge to a career in the skies with the Royal Canadian Navy.

Nowadays, his feet are firmly planted on the ground, helping the Belleville Theatre Guild bring life to their productions as set construction supervisor.

The 65-year-old Sidney ward resident spent 32 years with the navy — 17 of them flying a twin engine anti-submarine aircraft called the Tracker as well as helicopters.

The funny part was that he didn't start out wanting to be a pilot.

"When I joined, I originally wanted to be an engineer in the navy but I didn't have a university education at the time," Judge recalled. "But they said they were looking for pilots and all you needed was a Grade 12 education."

Having a Grade 13 diploma convinced him to give aviation a try.

"Looking back, being in the navy and being a pilot was the best thing that ever happened to me."

Born and raised in Belleville, Judge joined the Canadian navy in 1955.

He graduated from Belleville Collegiate Institute in 1952 and spent the next three years working for his dad's home repair and minor construction firm before deciding to drop by the naval recruiting office at the Belleville Armouries.

"I was in sea cadets here in Belleville for six or eight years as a young boy and that motivated me to join the navy. And it was by coincidence that I fell into becoming a naval aviator."

In his 17 years flying with the navy, he logged more than 3,500 hours and got to see much of the northern hemisphere, especially England and northern Europe.

He flew with the carrier Bonaventure until the vessel was retired in 1969; he then flew out of Shearwater, N.S.

Edge moved to National Defence headquarters in Ottawa in 1972 and spent the rest of his naval career in the intelligence and operations branch.

"I was flying a desk for those 15 years," he joked.

He retired from the navy in 1987 and returned home to Belleville.

"I was born here and it's a nice spot," he said.

He opened up a carpentry and home repair business and kept himself busy until about 18 months ago when he retired again.

"I just decided I had better things to do."

But he's not giving up his volunteer position with the theatre guild, overseeing the construction of stage sets for its various productions.

"We start in September and we go to June and it's quite a challenge. You have to take the set designer's concepts and ideas and change that into hard walls and doors," he said.

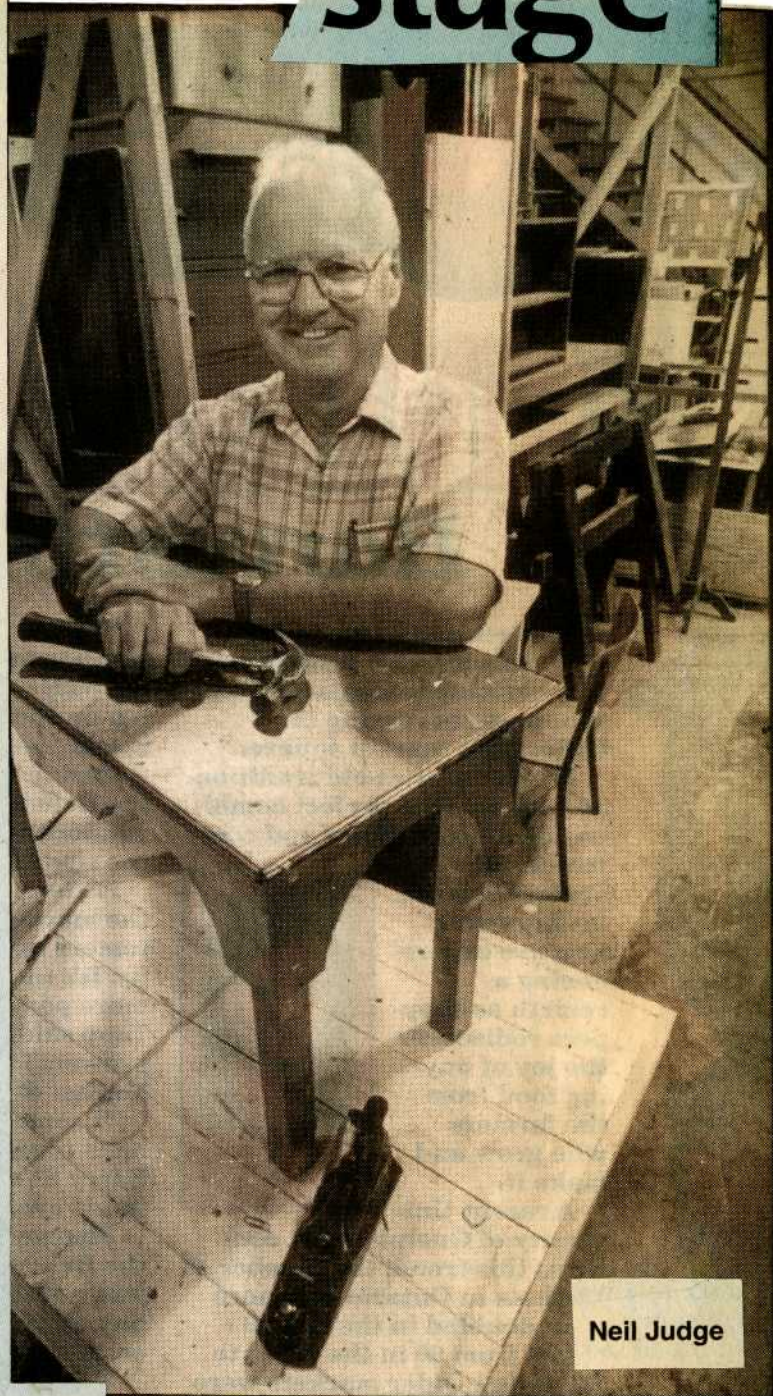
"When I see a play, it's part my baby," he quipped.

Aside from his work at the theatre, Judge said he enjoys travelling in his motor home but acknowledges it's not the same without his wife, Marlene, who died in January of this year.

"I'm learning to garden now because she used to do all that. So far, I haven't killed any flowers."

Working on his house and visiting with his three children and six grandchildren also keep him busy.

"I'm planning on becoming more active in the community now as well."



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