

School News
Jacie B. Palmer
Arts and Ideas

living IN THE HILLS

GDHS woodworking teacher creates through mind's eye

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT
The Herald

Looking at the cherry wood TV and VCR cabinet being offered as first prize in Georgetown District High School's 4th Annual Craft, Art and Antique show, scheduled for this Saturday and Sunday, it's obvious a talented craftsman has been at work. No one would ever guess the talented craftsman is totally blind.

Roger Moore of Acton is blind, completely unable to see the lustrous sheen he's given the polished wood or the attractive design of the swivel cabinet.

But he can feel it and through this sense, knows how good it looks and it gives him a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Before he lost his sight, Mr. Moore was a horse farmer, working with his dad on the family farm to raise and barrel race quarter horses. He began working on the farm after graduating from Grade 8 at Stewarttown Middle School, much to the dismay of his woodworking teacher, Dave Lawrence who wanted his student to stay in school.

The two had developed a relationship while the young Roger was in his woodworking class, a relationship they rekindled four years ago when Mr. Moore lost his sight.

Mr. Moore's blindness is the result of a disease he's had since he was two-years-old; diabetes. When he was 22, his doctor noticed the disease was affecting his eyes and within a year, Mr. Moore was completely blind. He became one of approximately 400 Canadians who lose their sight to diabetes every year, according to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB).

"After I went blind, I decided to call up my old teacher, Dave, at his

home," said Mr. Moore. "I knew he'd left Stewarttown and was teaching at E.C. Drury and he told me he was coming up to Georgetown."

Mr. Lawrence is now the technical director at GDHS and he urged Mr. Moore to call him back after he finished an independent living course at the CNIB in Toronto.

"I was surprised when he called," admits Mr. Lawrence. "I'd never worked with a blind person before."

But he was eager to help Mr. Moore and in 1988, Mr. Moore signed up for the adult woodworking class under the guidance of a teaching assistant, Bob Gillett of Georgetown. During the next three years, he began to develop a talent he'd never explored before he lost his sight.

Mr. Moore said having been sighted and knowing how the woodworking machines look helped him a lot in his learning.

"Anything I touch, I have a picture of in my brain," he said. "That definitely helps me."

Despite the danger for both sighted and blind people of cutting oneself on the bladed woodworking machines, Mr. Moore said he was never afraid of injuring himself.

"Not being afraid is the biggest reason I can still do things."

Other difficulties, such as measurement, he's overcome by developing his own tools. Since he cannot see a ruler, Mr. Moore created a sliding block ruler that clicks every sixteenth of an inch, allowing him to count the clicks to determine a measurement.

Soon after graduating from the class, Mr. Moore took on another challenge. He began teaching wood working to high school students.

Mr. Lawrence explains. "We

needed help with students in the classes and we knew Roger could do it."

So Mr. Moore began working at the school, five days a week. In turn, he earns high school credits while acting as a teaching assistant and is now only one credit shy of earning his Grade 12 diploma.

But for Mr. Moore, the satisfaction of contributing to the students and the school is more important than the diploma.

"I really enjoy it," said Mr. Moore. "I like giving back to this school because it gave so much to me. I have fun with the kids because they don't look to me as a teacher, they can relate to me."

Mr. Lawrence said the "kids basically love Roger. They work very well with him."

They've also learned to respect Mr. Moore's guide dog, Buddy, and know not to touch him while he's in harness.

Both Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Moore hope to continue their association and with a teaching strategy that has benefitted not only themselves, but the high school students as well.

Mr. Moore will also continue to create cabinets, hope chests, and other wooden furniture at his own workshop at the family farm.

People can see his work at the 4th Annual GDHS Craft, Art and Antique Show at the school from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Also on display will be his cherry cabinet complete with a 20 inch color television which is first prize in the show's lucky draw. Second prize is an IBM compatible computer donated by Logicsys Technologies and third prize is a framed limited edition print by John Harrington.

Mr. Moore will be one of over 100 vendors at the show.



This beautiful cherry TV and VCR cabinet was made by Acton woodworker Roger Moore but he'll never see the craftsmanship of the cabinet because he's completely blind. Mr. Moore, seen here with his guide dog Buddy, lost his sight four years ago to diabetes but hasn't let his disability stop him from becoming a master craftsman and teaching assistant at Georgetown District High School. (Herald Photo)

ADULT LITERACY Adult tutors can open doors previously closed

By HEATHER ANGUS
Herald Special

This is the fourth of a four-part series about tutor/student success stories at the North Halton

Literacy Guild. One-on-one tutoring for any adult in Halton Hills is free, confidential, and individualized. (Study where and when it suits you.) You can get

your own tutor by calling Ave Edington at the North Halton Literacy Guild, 873-2200 or 876-4756.

Larry (not his real name) and his tutor, Irene Saunders, were matched by the North Halton Literacy Guild in the spring of 1990. Larry's reasons for getting a tutor were "to better myself at my job, and to improve my self-confidence... I didn't want to feel unusual."

Larry, who is a service representative for a railway supplier, needs reading and writing to find parts descriptions in manuals, and to fill out invoices.

At his previous job as a mechanic, he was forbidden by co-workers to answer the phone, because he would take messages incorrectly. That embarrassing experience motivated him to get help. He joined a local literacy program while he was living in Guelph, and then the North Halton Literacy Guild when he moved to this area.

"There were a lot of job opportunities I never tried for because they involved reading and writing," Larry says. "That's why I'm so good with my hands... it was one of my ways of getting around."

Larry could not write, but he was able to read. However, he never used to read much. "I'd see all the words and think, 'Nah, it's too much work,'" he says.

Larry says he was put into a class for "slow learners" in

Grade One, and never bothered trying at school after that. "When I quit school, they said I was at Grade 10 level," he recalls. "But I figure I was at less than Grade 5."

"In high school, I had two lunches and four shop classes... no English at all," Larry says of his youth in a rural community in eastern Ontario.

Larry now enjoys learning about English spelling and grammar, with the help of his tutor. "I'm the kind of person who wants to go by rules (in language), just like in math," he says. "Having a tutor helps structure your learning, and there is someone to answer your questions."

Larry attended community college classes about 10 years ago for upgrading in English and math. He prefers the program at the North Halton Literacy Guild because it is one-on-one, and "there's more time spent just on me."

Both Irene and Larry have full-time, day jobs, so they meet one evening a week in the local library. Their sessions sometimes include a game of Perquackey (rolling letter dice, and making as many words as possible with them). They also work on crossword puzzles together, and Larry is reading a Farley Mowat novel.

Larry could not spell his wife's name until six months after meeting Irene. As well, Irene taught Larry to address a

Christmas card to his parents, something he had never done before.

Larry says tutoring has also made a difference in his job performance; he now writes invoices, rather than give them to secretaries. He hopes to learn to use computers; there is one in his home, and his workplace may become computerized in the near future.

"I think the computer is one of the best things for literacy," Larry says. "It gives you typing, English, and composition skills." The North Halton Literacy Guild has two computers that students may use, at no cost.

Larry now reads bedtime stories to his two-year-old daughter, but not as often as he'd like. "You'd be surprised at how difficult children's stories can be," he says.

"When we first met my wife couldn't believe that I couldn't read or write," Larry says. "At one time, I couldn't even read the menu in restaurants."

Larry has come a long way, in both his ability and attitude about literacy. "I'm not really self-conscious about it," he says. "I know what I can do, and I know my limits."

His advice to people who need help with literacy is to get a tutor, or, as a start, to "get a copy of the book, 'Why Johnny Can't Read,' to learn the rules. Then get yourself a book on a subject that you like. If something is interesting, you'll learn it."



Tutor Irene Saunders