

Tinkering with clocks

What makes Jake Smith tick

By BRUCE STAPLEY
Chances are good that if you were to ask Jake Smith for the time of day, you'd get a whole lot more than you bargained for.

The 76-year-old Stouffville resident has spent most of his life tinkering with time pieces of every description. And while he admits to being baffled by so many of today's clocks and watches with their computerized, digital read outs, there isn't a man alive who better understands the workings of the traditional tinker.

There's no better proof of that fact than his recently completed project, a solid-brass Skeleton Clock that took him almost two years to build.

The clock, so named because there is no housing to hide the mechanism, is something he had never attempted to build in all his years of maintaining, repairing, and selling clocks and watches. "The Skeleton Clock was something I always wanted to build," he says. "The other year I said I better get at it."

It took two months just to figure out his plan for the gears, such was the complication of the project.

"Everything has to be made right," he explains. He will tell you how an eight-leaf pinion must have an exact 14 1/4 degree angle in its set up, or it won't work, and how he found that out the hard way. "I tried it with 14 degrees, and it wouldn't work. But at 14 1/4, it rolled like a belt."

For Jake, it was important that the clock be designed and built totally by himself. And given the man's impressive abilities at things mechanical, it is no wonder it turned out so well.

"While he didn't keep track of the hours, saying those things don't matter when it's just a hobby, his wife Bernice claims he would slip out to his little workshop behind the house day and night until it was completed.

"I hadn't made those kind of gears in 50 years," he said, referring back to the days when he served his clockmaking apprenticeship for a master clock maker in Richmond Hill in the 1930's. "I apprenticed under Jerry Smith, my father's first cousin. He was a member of the Horological Institute in Toronto. When I started to build my Skeleton Clock, there were times I wished I could have had old Jerry around to show me how."

But the end result has more than demonstrated Jake's own prowess. He claims the clock keeps perfect time, and due to the nature of its construction, he figures it will be keeping time for many a year.

"That clock should last centuries," he says proudly. "The main wheels are 1/4-inch brass." Being a perfectionist, Jake made the clock with a deadbeat escapement, which, he claims, is much harder to make and set up than the more common ticking controls known as "anchor" or "recoil" escapements. "It has to be per-

fect, or it won't run."

To top it off, Jake found an antique glass dome in Pennsylvania to act as a dust cover for his Skeleton Clock. He then went about the task of building a base out of birds eye maple, and cabinet of walnut on which the clock and base stand.

His woodworking expertise, which has led to the building of his own dining and bedroom furnishings, dates back to when he was a 16 year old on his father's farm north of Unionville, where he was born and raised.

"I went to work one winter for another farmer who was also a carpenter," he recalls. "I told him I'd like to build a grandfather clock, so he let me go ahead and build one in oak."

His grandfather had been a talented woodworker, and Jake feels he may have inherited some of his natural ability. "I still have a cradle that my grandfather made," he says.

Jake came to Stouffville in 1940, where he got married. He then bought a jewelry business in the old Ratcliff Block where the Bank of Commerce now stands. "I remember paying \$15 a month for rent. I did mainly clock and watch repairs."

He would change locations, moving to the building which now houses the Blue Orchid Restaurant in 1945, and finishing out his career in what is now The Woolwinder, from 1954 to 1977.

His recollections of the Stouffville business district in those

days are vivid, and he maintains that on a Saturday night, there were so many people milling around that it was as busy as the city.

And though he officially retired after closing the door in '77, he has never been without a project on the go. "I love making things," he admits. "And when it is finished, I love to see it go."

While most of his efforts have been directed towards clock building or repairing, and furniture building, he hasn't been above trying new fields of endeavor.

When the contractor stood him up, after promising to build a fireplace several years back, he set about the task of studying what was involved in building it himself, and proceeded to construct an impressive fireplace out of Tennessee and Georgia marble.

Jake still has the first clock he ever built. "I built it on the farm when I was 14," he remembers. "My brothers and sisters told me it wouldn't be ticking in the morning, but it was. Its crude, and it needs to be rebuilt, but I've never gotten around to it."

But his grandfather clock built while serving his apprenticeship still stands proudly in his dining room, along with his unique corner cabinets and sideboard. "I still have the blueprints for it," he maintains.

And while his own personal time clock keeps ticking, he's just as keen as he ever was when it comes to clocks.

"Everybody's got to have a hobby," he concludes.

Affordable housing a strain on sewers

STOUFFVILLE — Should Council give away six units of sewage space from its industrial reserve to provide affordable apartment housing in a Success Square addition?

Most members say no. Mayor Frank Sainsbury told a Planning Advisory Committee meeting May 17 sufficient sewer allocation is needed to clean up the area along Hwy 47 to Ringwood.

"No offense intended, but it's not a pretty sight," she said.

She recommended the Town stick by its commitment. Councillor Wilf Morley agreed. He said the matter of sewer allocation would be re-opened for discussion at the end of June. "We should wait until then," he advised.

But Councillor Jim Sanders disagreed.

"I think we should take the six units and provide the affordable housing we need so badly."

To which Councillor Margo Marshall responded: "You keep saying Stouffville shouldn't grow then you try and create affordable housing. I think you should give second thoughts to the balance of sewage, water and growth."

Jeremy Grant, proponent of the apartments, was told he could still proceed with the plaza addition, but residential expansion would have to wait.



Stouffville clockmaker Jake Smith admires his latest creation — a skeleton clock. Although retired, the 76-year-old man still enjoys making intricate time pieces.

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