

Tuning pianos is labor of love for local man

By BRUCE STAPLEY
As a teenager, Kent Stellan remembers how he used to love to watch as the blind piano tuner patiently brought the family upright back to perfect pitch.

Today, he has established himself as one of the new breed of piano tuner — college-trained, sighted, and people oriented. But his self-taught piano restoration skills, and his love of music and his work, make him a unique individual in his field.

Born and raised in London, Ontario, Kent moved to Toronto so he could take George Brown College's Piano Technician Program in 1982.

After several years spent working for piano stores in the Toronto area, jobs that saw him tune pianos in Roy Thomson Hall and for the CBC, Kent decided to strike out on his own.

But it was only last summer that he finally put the final piece into place when he left the frenzy of life in the big city and relocated in Stouffville.

"I wanted to get out of the rat race," he said. "I discovered Stouffville one day last year while on a piano tuning call. It was basically love at first sight."

"After I finished my tuning, I marched into the nearest realty office, and by the end of the day, we had put in an offer on a house."

Kent, who studied piano and pipe organ as a teen, decided to make a career of piano tuning when he realized how difficult it would be to make a living as a professional musician.

"I decided to find something in the middle," he said. "I had decided it might be hard to support myself as a musician."

And while his tuning skills came from his schooling, and a few years of application, his restoration of pianos was an afterthought.

"Restoration came as a spinoff," he added. "People would come to me and ask if I can salvage their old piano."

He spent some time with a

cabinet maker in Toronto, but concedes he picked up the skills needed to rebuild the old models on his own.

"I've learned a lot on my own, like wood working, cabinetry, finishing, etc."

His confidence is now at the point where he'll tackle anything.

"I'm just finishing a restoration of an 1860 John Broadwood Grand Piano made in England. It wasn't working at all. I restrung it, and restored the action."

Kent adds that the English piano has taken 130 hours of work, and he maintains he went ahead with the job despite the warnings of some people that it was too risky to get involved with such a classic.

He is also restoring a 1913 West German grand, and he recently purchased a vintage 1896 Canadian-made upright. "It didn't work at all when I bought it. It had been vandalized."

The restorations become a matter of determination to see the job through, says Kent. "You get to the point where you just keep going because you want to see the project completed so you can stand back and look at it."

"I've had several jobs where I've cut the bill at a certain point because I just wanted to get it done right for them."

Kent says he thoroughly enjoys dealing with the public, giving them advice, and helping them choose the right piano.

His clients include concert pianists, music teachers, and even Supreme Court judges.

"I get to see them at home on a Saturday morning," he said. "It's so different from hearing about the same people during the week on the news, involved in court cases or whatever."

And his efforts are appreciated by his customers.

"I get a great kick out of making a neglected piano sound good for the first time," he said. "And then people are so grateful, and they start becoming prouder of their pianos. It's all quite gratifying."



Stouffville resident Ken Stellan says that tuning and restoring pianos is more than a business it's a labor of love.

New ski resort close by

Ontario's newest ski area, Lakeridge Ski Resort, will open in December.

Located just off Lakeridge Rd., just 19 kilometres north of Hwy. 2 in Ajax, Lakeridge Ski Resort is just a 25-minute drive from Metro Toronto.

The resort is the first ski resort built in the province in the last 18 years. It will be serviced by two quad chair lifts and will have a 9,000-square-foot chalet.

Lakeridge will cater to every level of skier, from the beginner to the advanced cruiser or mogul skier.

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