

Piano man Kent Stallan of Stouffville purveys a dying craft

Kent Stallan is a craftsman, a purveyor of a dying art in an age when electronics has rendered so many old-fashioned pastimes obsolete.

He is a piano tuner. Or, as he prefers to be called, a tuner technician, in deference to his years of training at George Brown College in Toronto. It's the only institution in Canada which still

offers this training.

Kent claims to be a bit of an enigma. He's a young (38 years), sighted piano tuner, with not even a trace of grey hair, practicing an art form traditionally associated with men, oftentimes blind, who are approaching their senior years.

The commonly accepted stereotype, he explains, came about as

the result of the gap that occurred in the training of piano tuners in Canada when the last of the nation's piano factories, of which there were approximately 200 in 1910, closed up shop in the 1970s.

With no one left to pass on the craft, there were no new tuners certified. George Brown initiated its program some 15 years after



From Where I Live

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He also restores vintage pianos, with his coup de grace having been the refurbishing of an 1863 grand piano from England.

He is currently working on an 1891 classic from Germany, and he recently sold a 1904 Heintzman to an Uxbridge woman.

His job brings with it a variety of perks. Just the other week, he tuned an old player for a Toronto restaurateur. Upon completing the task, he and his customer proceeded to pump away at the pedals of the forerunner to today's karaoke machines until midnight. They went through music roll after music roll while consuming gourmet delights from the man's place of business.

As one of only a handful of piano tuners in the area, Kent is less concerned with competition than he is with the proliferation of the traditional piano.

The instrument has been a dying entity since the 1920s, when the popularity of radio, and eventually the advent of TV and video, succeeded in prying people away from their pianos.

But the trend today, says Kent, is toward bringing back the vintage uprights, both Canadian and foreign-made.

He had worried that the introduction of the electric piano would hammer the last nail into the coffin of the traditional piano. But he's found there are still many traditionalists out there intent on hanging onto their old models.

As for the future, Kent admits he doesn't know exactly what lies ahead for the instrument that provides him with his living.

But he is relatively confident that with so few people entering the trade, there will always be work for him to do.

the last piano had been built in this country. And with the college sending out only 20 graduates every two years, the market is less than flooded.

Kent had originally set out to become an accomplished pianist, studying intensely from the age of 13 right into his 20s.

But he decided he didn't want to be a starving artist, and turned a summer job as a pipe organ tuner into a full time pursuit servicing the big instruments used by the Conklin Shows people. He tuned pipe organs for the Organ Grinder in Toronto, and adjusted the player pianos at Mother's restaurants.

Deciding he wanted to broaden his scope, Kent finally enrolled at George Brown at the age of 28. Upon completing the course, he set up his own business in Toronto in 1984.

It was while he was tuning a piano on the outskirts of Uxbridge he decided he would rather live in a small town.

He convinced his wife Betty that this was where they should be, and they moved to Stouffville in 1988, where Kent set up shop in his home.

He now makes house calls as far away as Toronto, but prefers to seek out the number of people in York and Durham Regions who still own, or have recently acquired, pianos.



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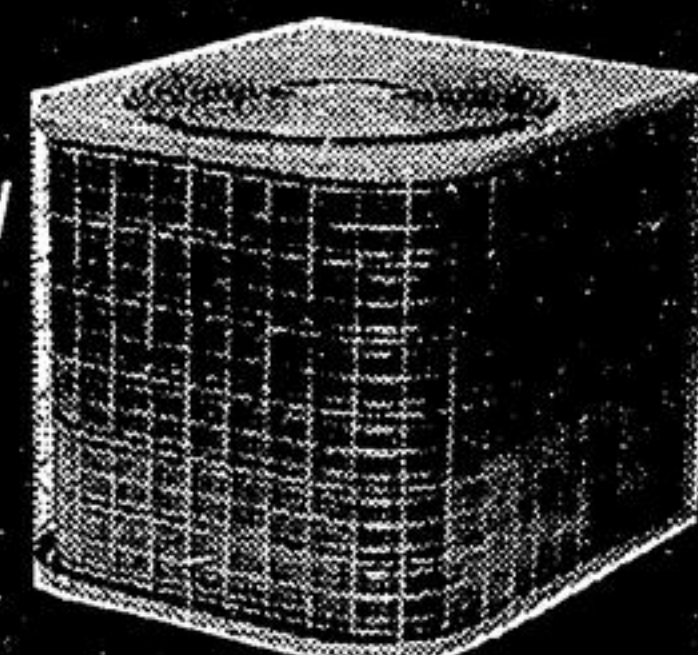
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