

arts & entertainment

The Arts

Paul Simpson: Puppet master, toymaker, artist

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After 16 years in the Stouffville area, toymaker, puzzle designer and historian Paul Simpson is heading back to his west coast roots.

Before he leaves, he will be conducting a series of workshops for young people at Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum, passing on his unique skills in creating cone puppets, wooden tops and Brazilian beetles.

Simpson's puppets are a well-known feature of the children's section at Whitchurch-Stouffville Library, where they provide an endless source of fascination for readers of all ages.

His designs are based on traditional toys, such as Jacob's ladders and acrobats.

"They're re-designed from early material, but they're more solid and durable," explained Simpson.

"Most traditional toys were single-purpose, but I feel they can have many aspects to them, allowing them to be used in areas like therapy, development and exercise."

Simpson's role goes far beyond designing and making toys.

He has lectured extensively in schools, as well as at museums, teaching and health conferences and historical societies.

He has been featured in major newspapers and has appeared on television and radio in a variety of programs including CBC's Morningside, Canada A.M. and Mr. Dressup.

Last year, Simpson was asked to do a series of construction workshops for the Ontario Science Centre.

"It was a very large scale project, with anywhere from 100 to 200 people each day."

All those people had to be supplied with kits and materials, he explained, "and it went extremely well, so we continued on through

the fall."

His Puppets and Playthings workshops for eight to 14-year-olds at Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum will run July 24 and 25.

"We'll do Brazilian beetles and tops combined on one day and on the other day we'll be doing cone puppets exactly like I make them. With the puppets it's mainly assembly, but it's complex assembly," he pointed out.

"You do a dry run before you put the glue on because there's a certain way everything has to be done to make them work."

The workshops, which will include demonstrations, will give students a chance to understand the process involved in designing and making toys.

Three workshops are planned for each day, at 9.30, 12.30 and 2.30.

Cone puppets will be featured July 24 and registration is \$10, including materials. Wooden tops and Brazilian beetles will be the focus of the July 25 sessions, with a registration fee of \$7.

While he will be sorry to leave the Stouffville area, Simpson is looking forward to his new life in B.C.

"I had to make a survival decision," he said.

With the uncertainty of business and the constant struggle to make ends meet, he decided it was high time for a change.

"You need to make a complete break and get out of where you are."

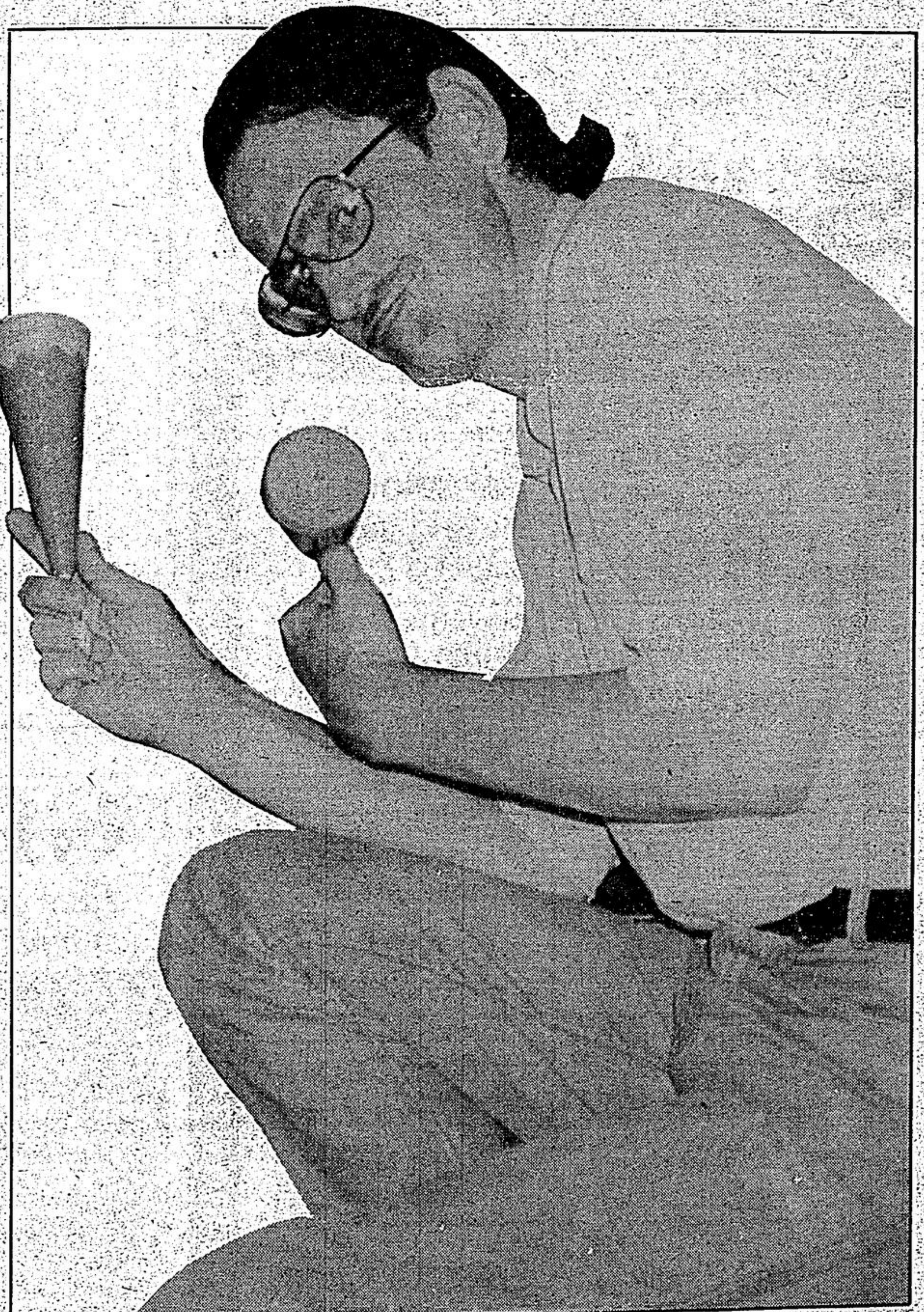
And that means he is selling all his toy-making equipment.

"Within a year I could buy the equipment again, but then it will be because I'm certain it's worth it."

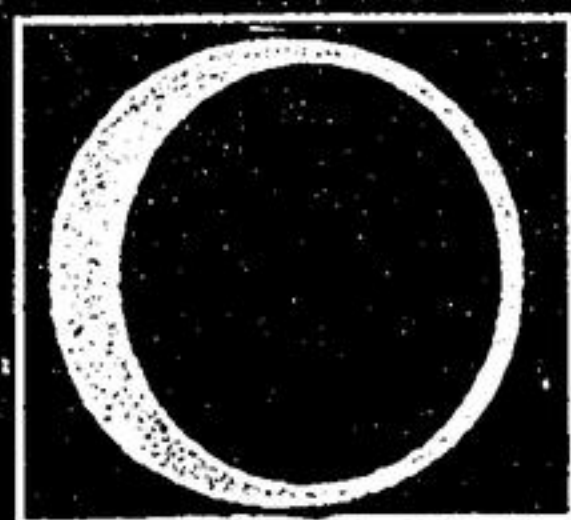
Simpson will be taking a number of toys and puzzles with him, along with his extensive library of books on the history of toys which have been his inspiration since he started out 14 years ago in Altona.

To register for the Puppets and Playthings workshops, call the museum at 727-8954.

□ Stouffville will lose a talented designer when he moves out west later in the summer



Paul Simpson is moving his toy shop, puppets and everything else to the west coast after 16 years in the Stouffville area.



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