

Masterpiece maker not slowing at 98

If only I could make something. Anything. I'm not talking about culinary skills — a pumpkin, an apple or a cherry pie.



Roaming Around
with Jim Thomas

Been there; done that. I'm referring to the art of handcraft, in particular, the ability to create possessions out of wood.

If so inclined, I'd build dozens of feeders and bird-houses and spread them about our back yard.

I'd also make lots of toy trains, trucks and tractors for the grandkids at Christmas. I might even attempt a solar-heated sun porch where I could laze away my remaining years staring up at the clouds and stars.

But I wouldn't dare. For I know before I begin each would be a disaster.

What makes this inept situation all the more embarrassing is the fact my father-in-law was an excellent carpenter.

So were several nephews. Even our youngest son took up the trade.

My dad, too, was an expert improviser using baling wire and binder twine. But me, I couldn't whittle a stick for an all-day sucker.

Acknowledging this, you can appreciate my satisfaction in receiving a phone message Friday.

"Drop over to Parkview Village some day and take a look at a cradle a friend of mine constructed," the caller said.

"A who has constructed what?" I enquired.

"It's a cradle, a cradle," the gentleman replied, "one of the nicest pieces of work I've ever seen."

"What's the man's name?" I asked.

"Thomas," he answered. "He's on the third floor."

I jotted down the particulars then gave Mr. Thomas a call.

Yes, his name is Thomas alright, Mel Thomas.

Fortunately for him, he's not a relative. For he builds things; beautiful things. His immaculate apartments displays countless items.

But my tour of inspection didn't end there. Elsewhere, the splendour of his handiwork is also evident including the aforementioned a cradle.

This cherrywood creation, completed only recently, has won the compliments of everyone who's seen it, including fellow artisans Harold Heise, John Reesor and Bud Sanderson.

What makes Mel's achievements all the more remarkable is the fact he's 98 with a 99th birthday coming up in September.

Born in Gamesville, N.Y., Mel's family, including a brother Gordon, moved to Montreal when he was only five. In 1920, they took up residence in Toronto. A self-

made success, Mel never advanced past the fourth grade. He honed his skills as a toolmaker with the firm of Acme Screw and Gear, then located on Weston Road.

With the advent of the Second World War, Mel joined the army, serving overseas with the 5th division, Royal Canadian Electrical Mechanical Engineers. He saw action in Italy, France, Belgium, Holland and Germany. When discharged in 1946, he held the rank of corporal.

"I saw the whole works," he says, admitting even today, he feels fortunate to have escaped unscathed.

Following a move to Stouffville, he worked for several area farmers including Albert Elson, Joe Winterstein, Bruce Morton and Richard Williams. In 1935, he married Muriel Williams, Richard's daughter. Prior to her death in 1997, they celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary.

One son, Charles, (Bud) lives in Ajax. A daughter Doris Ross resides in Vivian. He has five grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Hardly a day goes by Mel isn't busying himself in the village workshop. Two beautiful checkerboard tables enhance the recreation area.

"Norman Lehman and I had some great times down here," he said, "Norman was always good for a few jokes; we had a lot of laughs."

Several completed project have gone to the Salvation Army. A unique step stool occupies a place of prominence at Union Villa in Unionville.

"Just for the fun of it," Mel says, pointing to a lamp stand made from a stump.

It was Walt Hope who introduced Mel to Stouffville's celebrated barn-builder, Morley Symes.

"I learned a lot from Morley," he claims.

In recent years, Mel's undergone two major operations including open-heart surgery.

He keeps his mind sharp playing solitaire.

As for the cradle, he's not sure where it'll eventually end up.

"I'd like to frame it first and then decide," he said.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 50 years.

BUY A HAM FROM US! — YOU'LL BE HAPPY —

We've made hams in our business for the last 20 years — we just weren't ready for that first year. When I think back to those times I laugh a bit at what we went through to do it. Our cooking facilities consisted of a domestic range that we bought at Pascal's (long gone now, both the range and Pascal's). We absolutely wore out that poor stove roasting two hams at a time, day and night. In the ensuing years we added ovens — to the point where we can now cook about 65 hams at a time — and that doesn't include smoking!

I laugh as well when I think of the quantity of ham that we've sold over the years, by now in excess of a million pounds — not of raw product but fully finished product. What have we learned over the years?

The short answer is: don't change a thing! The recipe, the technique, the cure, the seasoning — none of that has changed. Our customers evidently appreciate this, because if you took a poll let's say for the occasion of Easter — you'd be amazed at how far people come for our hams. If you've never had a hand-made ham, you'll be amazed at the texture, the tenderness and the flavour — qualities which made our ham the popular item it is today. — And if hand-made is what you're used to, we're it.

- Maple-Sugar Ham ~ Whole or Half 6⁵⁰ lb.
 - Boneless Black-Forest Ham ~ Whole or Half... 6⁵⁰ lb.
 - Traditional Bone-In Smoked Easter Ham 2⁹⁹ lb.
- ~ Its Best to Order 905-940-0655 ~

CORNERED BEEF

We've made a good-size batch of our corned beef for this week. We buy large size beef brisket points to make these. We trim them lean, cure them in a savoury brine and cut them to size. I love corned beef with cabbage. Not only will we have that dish available on the Ready-To-Go counter, we'll have recipes for you to take home — AND — we'll supply the cabbage FREE to go with it. (Minimum 2lb piece) It's a good deal all round! 25% OFF THIS WEEK Reg. \$5.99 lb

... THINGS THAT YOU SHOULDN'T MISS...

We will have some pretty nice hydrangeas in the store. I planted some of these in my indoor gardens and they look striking — not too tall and nice and full. If bouquets are your wish, we'll have lots, plus items to add to them as well.

The supply of fresh lamb is good, and we'll have our usual, plus a few boneless and seasoned lamb loins. It's an over-the-top roast which will serve about 6. Lamb sausages will be available in quantity — keep in mind that the do use some pork when we make these, if that is important to you.

As in years past, Doreen (my mother-in-law) will be making copious amounts of the mustard sauce to go with the hams this week. If you buy a whole ham, we get you one FREE. Other condiments which are hot this week will be our golden apple mint jelly and our Rosemary jelly — both really good with lamb.

Just like at Christmas, you'll be able to get turkey cuts a well; the whole ones will be in the 14-18 lb size as I've stated elsewhere, and don't forget the Hot Cross Buns!

IRISH CHEDDAR SAUSAGES

We'll be making these nicely-seasoned pork sausages with Irish Cheddar and a splash of Guinness for this week — in keeping with the St. Paddy's Day theme. 25% OFF THIS WEEK Reg. \$4.50 lb.

HOT CROSS BUNS ARE READY!

FRESH TURKEYS

We'll have some of our amazing turkeys for Easter. The size will be 14 - 18 lbs.

If you'd like one, give us a call at

905-940-0655



By Kate MacDonald

WHAT'S HAPPENIN' NEXT WEEK!

We won't have an ad next week because the timing isn't too good. Let me tell you now that we'll be closed BOTH Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

What that means is that you'll need to plan ahead a bit and have most of your shopping arranged by Thursday. Saturday will be a busy day because we'll be doing some of the Friday business, all of the Saturday business and all of the Sunday business on that day.

OUR OLD-FASHIONED CABBAGE ROLLS

Cabbage Rolls are a hot item in our store. I imagine it's because they're so time-consuming to make that few of us make them at home. Whatever the reason, they don't last long in our freezer — especially when they're on sale. So come early and get them while they last! 25% OFF THIS WEEK Reg. \$10.95 Pkg. of 4

EASTER CHOCOLATE!

An extensive selection of really good Easter chocolate is available for both kids and grown-ups — yet further proof, should you need it, that a bona-fide chocoholic is at the helm of this store

— AND —

you could win one of two giant chocolate Easter rabbits from Chelsea Chocolates of Barrie. You must be under twelve, fill out your name and number and deposit it at the cash area of our store. Draw will take place on Thursday, March 20th.

WHAT'S BAKING! THIS WEEK...

We're baking Irish this week, and we'll be making

BAILEY'S CHEESECAKE, made with a shortbread crust, Irish Cream cheesecake, topped with Bailey's whipped cream. Two Sizes will be available..... \$14⁹⁵ & \$22⁹⁵

MINT NANAIMO BARS, it's a traditional base (cocoa, coconut, pecans and Graham Crumbs) with a mint custard filling, and of course, a chocolate glaze. Reg. \$2⁴⁹ Ea.

SHAMROCK MERINGUE NESTS, drizzled with dark chocolate Reg. \$1⁹⁹ Ea.

BAILEY'S CAKES, this is a vanilla cake filled with a Baileys-caramel custard, then iced and drizzled with caramel. Two sizes here \$14⁹⁵ & \$22⁹⁵

ALL THESE ITEMS WILL BE FEATURED AT 25% OFF THIS WEEK

WHAT'S BAKING! NEXT WEEK...

Starting this coming Monday, we'll have an Easter assortment happening; there will be.....

LAYER CAKES - white, iced in pastel, decorated in an Easter theme.

- Frosted chocolate & chocolate ganache, also decorated for Easter

- Carrot cakes, strawberry shortbreads and coconut-cloud cakes.

MOUSSE CAKES - we'll have black and white, chocolate-raspberry, neopolitan, mango-raspberry (something new) and pistachio-lemon-strawberry.

CHEESECAKES - our assortment will include lemon, white-chocolate raspberry, white-chocolate blueberry and lime-coconut.

FLANS - will include blueberry lime, lemon curd and strawberry-cheese.

BRULEES - will be vanilla, Grand Marnier and lemon-strawberry.

— AND —

We'll also have mixed-berry jelly rolls, key-lime pies, Easter meringue nests and over-the-top Easter cupcakes. I know that from years past, its good to order your goodies in advance

SPECIALS IN EFFECT UNTIL CLOSING SUNDAY MARCH 16TH Hours:

Mon. 11:00-7:00 ~ Tues.-Thurs. 9:00-7:00 ~ Fri. 9:00-8:00

Sat. 9:00-6:00 ~ Sun. 10:00-5:00

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