

# The Cutting Edge

*A periodic magazine that celebrates the activities of the Shed and its members*

Volume 1 No. 14

Hornsby Woodworking Men's Shed

Summer 2017/18

## The Shed's Christmas Party – 17 November 2017

The success of the evening was due to the combined efforts of many volunteers. After lunch on the previous Tuesday, the members remaining from the workshop worked together to move all the tables and machinery to leave space for the traditional Christmas setup. Then the clean-up commenced with brooms, vacuums and mops. Meanwhile, the Christmas Catering Committee and their helpers were putting their plans into place to feed the 80 members and guests who had accepted the invitation. In addition, Hornsby Councillor Robert Browne and Federal MP for Berowra, Julian Leeser, were welcome attendees. They both made short speeches, confirming their support for the Shed's future and the provision of suitable accommodation.

As you can see from the photos, the workshop was transformed with Christmas decorations, tables laden with food, a display of members' work and items destined for our charities the following week. It is evident that members and guests are enjoying each other's company, the food and admiring the craftsmanship of the many items made during the year.





Alan Williams and his wife Pam won the raffle which raised \$379 for the Shed

# Christmas Party Preparation

The following photos tell the story of the work that went into preparing for our social event of the year.

On the Tuesday afternoon before the event, moving machinery, work benches and cleaning were the major tasks that members undertook enthusiastically.



# Member Profile: Kevin Wallace

## My Early Life

I can remember watching an advertisement on TV for *Parker Furniture*, depicting a “craftsman” fashioning furniture and telling my mother, Phyllis, that that is what I wanted to do when I left school (in 1967). I guess I must have been about 13 or 14 at the time. I had been studying woodwork and metalwork and doing well in both subjects. Other subjects; commerce, languages, tech-drawing, didn’t hold my interest and I had no talent for art or music. My woodwork teacher was <sup>1</sup>Les Miller, from the *New Inventors* TV show and who has, I think, written some woodwork books. Les was a former Rail Carriage Builder and, I think, I may be the only former student of his that took up the trade.



I was born in Hunter Street, Hornsby, on the site of the current Madison Building. My parents separated when I was about 3 years old (domestic violence) and I grew up in a large (divided) house in northern Hornsby with my (maternal) grandparents, my younger brother, Stephen, and my uncle and aunt and their children which eventually totalled six. I’m still close to this group of cousins. The three major men in my early life were Arthur, my grandfather, and two uncles, Stan (who we lived with) and Les who lived “around the corner”. All were gardeners and “bush carpenters”. At the rear of the large block was a wood pile, carefully stacked and covered from the elements, with old second-hand corrugated iron. We were allowed to “work” in the shed which had a large shadow board on the back wall, covered with tools (some I still have) and encouraged to help with building projects around the yard. I can recall helping Arthur build a new box to house the sanitary pan. The box, built from “pre-loved” timber carefully selected from the wood pile and probably covered in lead-based paint. Ignorance was bliss!

## And so to work..... and love!

As was the custom, of the 1960’s, most boys left school at the end of 4<sup>th</sup> form (Year 10), School



*Clyde Wagon Works, 1968, that’s me in the middle wearing the bib-and-brace overalls*

Certificate or not and I was amongst them. I had applied to the *NSW Government Railways* for a job as a carpenter. However all the positions had been filled by the time they got down to me and the only woodworking apprenticeship available was a Rail Carriage Builder. So I accepted, not wanting to disappoint the three nice gentlemen on the other side of the desk and the fact that I didn’t have or have any clue of, a “Plan B”.

Work started on December 4, 1967. We had a week’s induction, fire safety, first aid, workshop safety etc. then off to Clyde Wagon Works, Auburn. The workshops are still there but very little remains of the buildings which were built

in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. We were put into a compound (eventually totalling 36 boys, a few I’m still in contact with) with 4 instructors and given fundamental training in woodwork. We were kitted out with tools too; 16 chisels, 6 gouges, 4 saws, 4 planes, screwdrivers, claw hammer and mallet, 2 braces and 10

bits, 4 “G” clamps, try squares and marking gauges; all top quality and all the tools I’d ever wanted and dreamt about. Christmas came early in 1967! We spent the next week flattening the face (facing) of all those edged tools. It was an arduous, boring job and I still hate it. I still have nearly all of that tool kit and some look as new today as they did 50 years ago. Buy good tools, look after them and they’ll last you a life time!

The pay was \$18.80 per week (I still have the first payslip) and, after tax, I “took home” \$15.00. I gave \$5.00 to my mother for food and rent, (told) to put \$5.00 in the bank and enjoy the remainder.

After the Christmas break the training started in earnest, learning the basic fundamentals to prepare timber, checking for “wind”, flatness and square; making various joints, including my favourite – *dovetail joints*, and the use and care of the various tools. It was an excellent training ground as only the Railways could give.

Our first real project was to make a Sheep Van door. Just a rectangular frame with haunched mortise and tenon joints. In that year, I discovered a love of working with timber and building things. This was nurtured by the instructors and rigid standards enforced.

Most of the work that year was making various doors to supply the demand for the rest of wagon works. The largest of these was a louvre van door,

made from Oregon with 4”x 3” styles, 4 rails 2ft 7ins wide and 6ft 3ins high. The heaviest was a cattle van door, made of Tallow Wood, which would take 2 boys to turn it over. Although most of the components for these doors came from the Timber Mill with the mortise and tenons already cut, we had to “fit” them together and insure the joints “lined up” and the frame was “square”. Rigid standards enforced!

We made some of our own tools too. Timber mallet, oil stone box, German jack plane as well as a tool chest and tool box (both with dovetail joints). All of which I still use.

In the second year we went to #2 Section. Here I learnt to work in a team with two or three apprentices, under the tutelage of two tradesman, building GHG guards vans from the ground up. There was a hardwood frame covered by a res-coat plywood and a one-piece semi-elliptical plywood roof. The pillars (studs to a carpenter) were mortised into the 4” x 10” bottomside (bottom plate) and cantrail (top plate). Horizontal rails were half-lapped onto the pillars and the spaces in between had ½’ plywood “blocking” tightly fitted. Again, all the components for these vans come from the Timber Mill pre-cut, but we had to fit them. Everything was screwed together; there were no nails used.



Sheep Van, 4 wheeled.



Cattle wagon, 4 wheeled



GHG Guards Van

Even the 1¼” thick floor boards and 1½” x 1½” quad skirting was screwed down. Rigid standards enforced!

The next two years were spent at Chullora and Eveleigh (Redfern) Workshops and I worked on the various types of rail carriages, electric cars (red rattlers), diesel powered rail motors and mainline carriages. However I never worked with timber as much as I did in those first two years. I was doing well at tech, maybe not the best in practical but up in the top marks in the theory and technical drawing. So much so that, in the fourth year, I was sent to the Railway Design Office in York Street and spent the last few months of my apprenticeship on a drawing board. On finishing my apprenticeship, in 1972 I was offered a Mechanical Engineering Cadetship which I took up. After a couple of years in the Railway Design Office I moved to the Design Office of the Bus Division of the *Public Transport Commission*, as it was then known. This was more civil engineering than mechanical. In 1981 I moved back to *State Rail Authority* (another name change) and became a Maintenance Engineer at Clyde, where I'd started 14 years earlier and stayed for 9 years. I took a redundancy package in early 1990.

I'd decided add extensions to my house and use the “between jobs time” to manage the project and do some of the work myself. I extended the dining room and added a garage and a workshop. The latter of these was most important as it allowed me a space to build things and re-ignite those skills I'd learned 18 years' earlier. It was also a place for my tool kit instead of the spare room. It has become a place of many enjoyable and fruitful hours, working on projects and organising the shed. Sometimes I think I spend more time organising the shed than working in it.

This was my second foray into building renovations. In 1972 I bought an old house. Banking a third of my pay paid off! It was a small fibro cottage with a rusty tin roof and, over the next few years, I renovated the kitchen and bathroom, ripping out the old fibro stripping with knowing the health implications. Ignorance is bliss! I never quite got these renos finished before I demolished the old house and had the house I'm currently living in built in 1983.

### Personal Life

It was about this time (1990) that I met my partner, Mary. We were both single, never been married and no children. After all this time together we still don't have children and still haven't got married. However we do have a well-mannered fur child (cat).

### Other Distractions

In 1986 I had a *mid-life crisis* but couldn't afford a Porsche so I went backpacking instead. I travelled to Europe via Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Sudan and Egypt, staying in very cheap hostels and camping. After six months in Europe, I travelled home along the *hippie highway*, through Turkey, Iran and Pakistan to India and flew home from there. It was a great year, I still “dine out” (and bore Mary) on the stories; travel has become one of the passions in my life. The further off the beaten track the better but it's getting more difficult. My favourite book, *1001 Historic Sites You Must See Before You Die* has become my bucket list. I only have 734 places to see. I think I'm going to run out of time.

I spend one afternoon a week playing lawn bowls at the Asquith Bowling Club. In winter I play football (soccer) with the Hornsby Heights over 45s team. This is the same club I started with in 1963. I also have an interest in genealogy, including family history.

<sup>1</sup>. Les Miller was well known also for his part in *The Weekend Woodies* on ABC Radio, run by Simon Marnie. Les had a devoted following. He was a founding member of the Woodworkers Group of NSW and a contributing editor to the Australian Woodworker Magazine as well as a widely travelled demonstrator for the Working With Wood Show. At the time he also produced many instructional videos, on woodworking and related practical subjects.

## The Men's Shed

I belong to *The Traditional Tools Group* (TTTG) and, at one of its Brick Pit Tool Sales, I got talking to Ron Koutchavlis, took a flyer and then did nothing about it for a couple of years. However, after retiring in 2015 my interest was rekindled. On seeing the Shed, I was immediately impressed with the scale of the workshop and machinery. I enjoy the camaraderie with the members, learning the skills, rekindling old ones and sharing that knowledge with other members. I also hope that the reverse is true and that I can assist members with whatever knowledge I've gained building



things using wood. I also look at Club Projects and try to figure out how we could do things better, making it easier and less work. Such as laborious sanding!

I'd only been a member for a couple of months when I volunteered to be the Librarian. I hate seeing good timber and other materials being thrown away. The new Library shelving is an example to re-using an old wardrobe that would have gone to the tip.

Kevin's standing with the Shed was further enhanced when, at the 2017 AGM, he was elected to the position of Vice President.

## Back to the Shed in 2018

Our first day back was on 16 January. Bruce and Mark were mowing and clearing the leaves from the garden. The Shed was not crowded; it was a nice, calm and productive atmosphere.

At 9.30am, Jim Spence demonstrated the operation of the Triton routers with the new lift mechanism that he had recently fitted (with some difficulty).

The main changes are:

There is no need to bend down below the table to set the rocker switch to the “off” position and turn the knob to raise it to the full height so it locks the spindle. The routers are now enclosed in boxes and set to “on”. To raise the height to replace bits and collets, a crank handle is inserted into the hole (marked into segments and “UP”) in the table top and wound to the full height. Then two spanners (19 and 24mm) are used to either unlock or lock the collet to the router bit shank. The same crank handle is used for fine height adjustment. To use router bits with a 1/4” shank use the 1/2” to 1/4” collet adapter with the flange, those supplied can slip down the hole. Use the external switch for “on/off”.

The following pictures illustrate the process. Also refer to **SP06 Router Table Safety**.



# The Toy Maker Group and Annual Donations to Charity

At the First Committee meeting of the year, the annual programme for the toy makers is discussed and Fred Blaauw puts it together and organises the toy volunteers, at each workshop, to start work so that, by the end of the year, we have hundreds of toys to donate to under privileged children.

Members come to the Shed for a variety of reasons so it was pleasing to see a record number this year volunteer to work on toys, rather than their own projects. This accords with the Shed's Mission Statement: *To help charitable organisations by making toys and other items for the enjoyment and education of under privileged children and adults.*

Our charities, for many years, are Wesley Mission Penrith and the Salvation Army Hornsby. In addition to the toys, we donate \$500 to each charity. Wesley Mission picked up its share of the 450 toys on the Friday after the Shed Christmas party. The pictures show the toys, some of the proud toy makers and Wesley staff, filling up three vehicles.

- 6 HAWK TANKS (CONVERTABLE)
- 6 MISCELLANEOUS CARS
- 1 SMALL BICYCLE (DONATED)
- 10 ROLLER RATTLES
- 5 MARBLE RASERS
- 2 QUARTO GAMES
- 2 ABACUS
- 54 POLICE CARS
- 2 WALKING DOGS
- 2 PULL APART TRUCKS
- 4 BIG WHEEL RACERS
- 3 PULL ALONG TRACTOR / TRAILER
- 2 ENGINE PLUS CHARIOL
- 12 GUITARS
- 1 VINTAGE CAR
- 1 VINTAGE TRUCK
- 10 TUG BOATS
- 5 PUFFLES
- 4 MINI CARS
- 20 BRACKETS
- 1 PINK UTE
- 6 TRUCKS
- 1 PULL ALONG CART (LARGE)





To complete this story, I asked Rita O'Malley from Wesley to provide pictures of some of the recipients of our gifts. Although she had some, the subjects would not give permission for their external use.



Fred Blaauw with Andrew Luzzi and other Wesley staff

# 1st Hornsby Heights Scout Troop Visit

The scouts that visited the Shed on 2nd December are from Yarama Troop, part of 1st Hornsby Heights Scouts which is one of the biggest scout groups in the state (founded in 1965). The scout troop aims to challenge enquiring minds and bodies, to help scouts achieve their best, to encourage leadership and to build teamwork through many activities. The aim of visiting the Shed was in part badge work (visiting an organisation that services your local community) but also to teach the Scouts about the work that is achieved at the Shed - whether it is friendship (essential for mental health), toy building (charity) or working on your own project (self-worth). Often the Scouts visit the Police, RFS, HHH (Triple H is the Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Community Radio Station) or Ambulance - but it was great to visit a different organisation that the Scouts might not know about and, hopefully, who will later on in life consider joining.

The Scouting Association is a worldwide association with a membership of around 24 million young people. A boy or girl may join the association at the age of 6 and continue as a Youth Member until 26. The aim of Scouts is to encourage the physical, mental, social and spiritual development of young people so that they may take a constructive place in society as responsible citizens and as members of their local, national and international communities.



# Bunnings Dural Christmas BBQ

In mid-October the Dural Bunnings' Activities organiser contacted me with a possible vacancy for 23 December. We discussed whether it would be worthwhile; it could be very busy or people could be away on holidays at that time of the year. We eventually committed to schedule the usual planning and volunteer roster for what turned out to be a very busy and successful day.



The day was warm and the members who arrived early commenced set-up at 7.30am. We decided to offer the decorative reindeer for a donation.

After an hour or so, business picked up and was humming along well before the usual 12.00 to 2.00pm rush. The people on publicity engaged with the friendly shoppers, distributing flyers and there was a good vibe the whole day. Twelve reindeers found new homes and some generous customers made donations. There was a record order for eight sausage sandwiches.

Our thanks go to all the people who assisted to make the day so successful. The final result was a record for Bunnings BBQs – a gross of \$1,816 and a nett of \$1,300.

The following pictures tell the story:



# In and Around the Shed



Mark's a Treasure

# *Contributing To Super By Downsizing Your Home: 10-point Guide*

This topic came up during a recent lunch-time conversation about moving to retirement villages. I recalled that there was a change to superannuation law, due to come into effect from 1 July 2018 that would allow older people of any age to contribute up to \$300,000 each to super following the sale of their house. So I offered to do some research and have provided the facts below.

This information is for general knowledge only so does not constitute personal financial advice. (Refer to the last edition of this magazine for the article contributed by Tom Gait following his presentation on retirement villages.)

- **1.** Opportunity to boost super balance
- **2.** No 'work test' or age limit
- **3.** Retirement phase transfer balance cap remains in place
- **4.** Contributions not subject to the \$1.6 million Total Superannuation Balance restriction
- **5.** No requirement to buy a new home
- **6.** You must submit downsizing contribution form
- **7.** Contributions count toward Age Pension tests
- **8.** Transfer and property costs limit surplus capital
- **9.** Timeframe (90 days) for contributing sale proceeds into super
- **10.** 90-day timeframe may give opportunity to invest sale proceeds before contributing.

Many Australian retirees find they want a smaller home or a home more suited to their empty-nest requirements. For some Australians, selling the family home can be great way to release built-up equity to pay for retirement living expenses or in-home support that will allow them to stay at home longer. Older Australians are the people targeted by the Government's new policy (now law) to allow homeowners aged 65 years or over, to downsize their family home and invest the surplus into their super account. Although downsizing and contributing to super is an interesting idea, there are definitely some benefits and dangers – together with a few unknowns – to consider before taking the plunge.

From 1 July 2018, Australians aged 65 years or older will be able to make a non-concessional (after-tax) contribution into their super account of up to \$300,000 from the sale proceeds of their family home if they have owned the property for at least 10 years. The legislated rules indicate that the property sold must be the person's home (main residence and be eligible for the main residence exemption for capital gains tax). Couples will be able to contribute up to \$300,000 each, giving a total contribution per couple of up to \$600,000. Any super contributions made using the new downsizing rules are in addition to any voluntary contributions made under the existing non-concessional (after-tax) contributions cap.

**Important:** Although the new downsizing and super law covers downsizing the family home and using some of the proceeds to buy a new home, (and the balance contributed to super), it is unclear what happens if the sale occurs because a person is moving into an aged care facility. It is also uncertain what happens if the person sells the home and moves into another owned property, although on the basis of the new laws, where an individual moves to after the home sale does not seem to affect the opportunity to make the downsizing contribution. The law does not require the individual to buy another home.

**Note:** The downsizing and super contributions proposal was announced as part of the 2017/2018 Federal Budget (May 2017 Budget). The proposal became law on 13 December 2017.

Set out below are 10 important issues to need consider before downsizing your home and contributing to your super account.

## 1. Opportunity to boost super balance

Retirees who have not had the opportunity to save sufficient funds for a comfortable retirement will be able to use the new downsizing cap to top up an inadequate super balance. For some people, using the surplus proceeds from downsizing to make a super contribution may be their first chance to use the beneficial tax environment of the super system.

## 2. No 'work test' or age limit

The existing 'work test' for voluntary contributions made by those Australians aged 65-74 does not apply to downsizing contributions. **Note:** People aged 75 and over who are currently unable to add to their super account will also be able to make a downsizing contribution, irrespective of whether they worked or not.

## 3. Retirement phase transfer balance cap remains in place

Australians making a downsizing contribution into their super account will still face a \$1.6 million transfer balance cap on the amount of super savings they can move into tax-exempt retirement phase income streams. If a person has reached their \$1.6 million transfer balance cap, then any downsizing contribution he or she makes will need to remain in accumulation phase (and will be subject to 15% tax on any earnings derived from the investments made from that contributions).

## 4. Contributions not subject to the \$1.6 million Total Superannuation Balance restriction

Since 1 July 2017, an individual cannot make non-concessional (after-tax) contributions to a super account if they have a Total Superannuation Balance of \$1.6 million or more. Individuals who have maxed out their opportunity to make non-concessional contributions to a super account, will still be able to make a downsizing contribution, as these contributions are exempt from the new \$1.6 million Total Superannuation Balance limit that restricts you from further non-concessional contributions (from 1 July 2017). **Tip:** The exemption applicable for downsizing contributions means that anyone who has more than \$1.6 million in super (in both accumulation and pension phase), can make a downsizing contribution from 1 July 2018.

## 5. No requirement to buy a new home

An individual making a downsizing contribution (from the sale of the principal place of residence) is not required to buy a new home after selling the home.

## 6. You must submit downsizing contribution form

Downsizing contributions will be invested within the super environment, which means such assets will be able to take advantage of the lower tax rate levied on investment returns within the super system. Earnings received on a super balance are only taxed at 15% (or are tax-exempt if rolled into a retirement income stream), rather than taxed at the person's normal marginal tax rate.

**Important:** Given the tax advantages, it's worth noting that the ATO will be responsible for administering the scheme. Before accepting contributions under the downsizing scheme, super funds require verification on behalf of the ATO that downsizing contributions are from the sale of a family home owned for more than 10 years. An individual planning to make a downsizing contribution must

provide his or her super fund with the special form before or at the time of making the downsizing contribution.

## 7. Contributions count toward Age Pension tests

The government has confirmed downsizing contributions will be counted for the assets and income tests used to determine eligibility for the Age Pension and DVA benefits. Downsizers will be moving money out of an exempt asset (their family home), into the non-exempt and assessable environment of their super fund (see also Point 9). It's also worth noting that your super balance (including downsizing contributions), are also used to determine eligibility for residential aged care and home care services.

**Important:** Anyone considering taking advantage of the new downsizing policy should seek professional advice on how it will affect their particular situation before making any decisions.

## 8. Transfer and property costs limit surplus capital

The costs involved in selling a family home can be substantial due to high stamp duty and land taxes, so people considering downsizing should carefully calculate their impact. In addition, selling a large home and downsizing to a smaller property does not always release much excess capital (particularly in a capital city), so potential downsizers should check they will have sufficient funds left over for a worthwhile super contribution.

## 9. Timeframe (90 days) for contributing sale proceeds into super

The new downsizing law specifies that an individual hoping to take advantage of this measure must make the downsizing contribution within 90 days of receiving the sale proceeds (typically settlement day) from their family home before they are prohibited from making a downsizing contribution.

Centrelink rules currently give pensioners who sell their principal residence a 12-month exemption under the assets test for the Age Pension but there is no grace period for this type of super contribution.

**Note:** You can only take advantage of this measure for one sale, that is, if you have made downsizing contributions (which can be in multiple contributions up to \$300,000) from a home sale, you cannot use this policy again at a later date.

## 10. 90-day timeframe may give opportunity to invest sale proceeds before contributing

The downsizing policy starts from 1 July 2018. The new laws don't appear to preclude investing the sale proceeds, or mixing the proceeds with other money, in the period between settlement and making a super contribution.

*Source – SuperGuide, December 18, 2017, article by [Janine Mace](#)*

# The Statistics of Life Expectancy

Like many developed countries, life expectancy at birth in Australia has improved remarkably over the last 125 years. Significant decreases in death rates, most notably for infants, and changes in the prevalence of disease patterns have contributed to the Australian population living longer than previously recorded.

A person born in 2015 is expected to live between 33.2 years and 33.7 years longer than someone born in 1890. Life expectancy increased from 47.2 years to 80.4 years for males and from 50.8 years to 84.5 years for females. While overall life expectancy has improved, gains have not occurred equally across selected time periods.

## People aged 65 years and over

As a consequence of an ageing population and improvements in social, economic and living standards, there has been a major shift in causes of death from infectious diseases to chronic diseases within older age groups over the century. This has resulted in larger gains in life expectancy over time for people aged 65 years and over. From 1890 to 2015, males aged 65 years and over shared 5.3% of total male life expectancy gain, which accelerated to 59.4% during 1997 to 2015. Similarly, the gain in life expectancy for females aged 65 years and over increased from 13.0% during 1890 to 2015 to 68.2% by 1997 to 2015.

Your health and lifestyle have a significant effect on longevity. Have a look at the AMP calculator “How long can I expect to live?”

Life expectancy (expected age at death in years) at different ages by sex, 1881–1890, 1960–1962 and 2013–2015

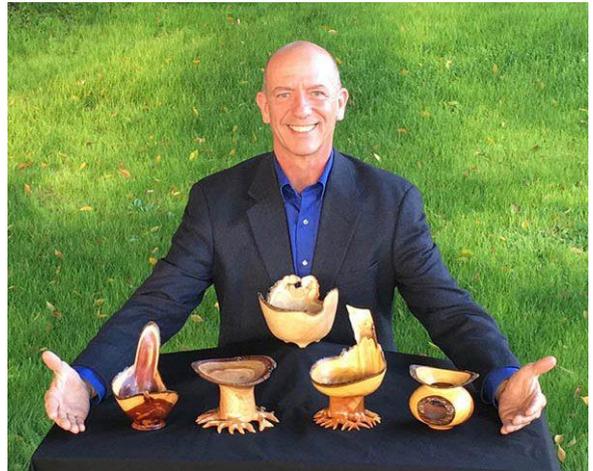
Age (years)	Males			Females		
	1881–1890	1960–1962	2013–2015	1881–1890	1960–1962	2013–2015
<b>0 (birth)</b>	47.2	67.9	80.4	50.8	74.2	84.5
<b>1</b>	54.3	69.5	80.7	57.4	75.5	84.8
<b>15</b>	59.5	70.1	80.8	62.5	76.0	84.9
<b>25</b>	62.1	70.8	81.1	64.7	76.3	85.1
<b>45</b>	68.0	72.4	82.1	70.6	77.4	85.6
<b>65</b>	76.1	77.5	84.5	77.3	80.7	87.3
<b>85</b>	88.9	89.1	91.2	88.9	89.8	92.2
<b>95</b>	97.2	97.3	98.0	97.3	97.6	98.3

Sources: ABS 2014a; ABS 2016 (Table S1).

## Tom Peter, Arborist/Woodturner, Creates Pieces Rich with Emotional Meaning

While working on tree trimming jobs as an arborist in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota, Tom Peter would notice things about the trees. “As I cut them, I would see the inner beauty,” he noted. “You can probably imagine cutting that tree and seeing that cross-section and saying, ‘Oh my-gosh, look at those colours!’”

So, after a friend taught him how to turn bowls (something that Tom found he had an innate talent for), he started turning some of the wood from those tree trimmings into natural edge bowls. Then he found a connection between the bowls he was making, the trees they came from, and the people who loved those trees.



“My daughter coined the name ‘heart-based company’ because that’s what this is: It’s really a labour of love, I get paid for it and it’s about connecting people with their trees.”

The start of Tom’s company, Respectful Transitions, came from an experience he had while still working full-time for a Minneapolis-area tree company. Since he had customer communications’ skills due to prior work experience in the insurance and telecommunications industries, the tree care company “would throw me into some really tense situations.”

In this case, “There was a particularly tense situation on the chain of Minneapolis lakes. There was a request to remove a tree that happened to be a 70-year-old English yew, which in my mind should not have been taken down. However, the new homeowners, in what I call the ‘starter

castle’ just wanted to wipe out the entire landscape. This particular tree was on the border between them and a house which was actually on the historic register. I show up on site and I know this isn’t going to be pretty. They wouldn’t send me to these things if there wasn’t something brewing. “So, sure enough, I got there, and



the neighbour lady said, ‘You are not taking down that tree!’ and I said, ‘You know, you’re right. I love this tree! What’s the deal?’ So she told me this wonderful story about how her daughter used to climb to the top of the tree, which was across from the second story window, because mom was a seamstress and she needed to do her work, so her daughter would take her teddy bear up the tree and talk to mom because now she’s in the window and mom can see daughter

and daughter can see mom. She was expressing the emotional challenge that her daughter would have by coming home that winter and seeing the tree gone.

“Anyway, through this conversation, getting all of her emotions out, she was then able to let go of the tree and say, ‘You better take that tree down.’ It was kind of funny because I was arguing with her and I said, ‘You know, this is a beautiful tree and it really shouldn’t be taken down.’ Then she said, ‘Well, what’ll happen if you don’t?’ So I said, ‘Ah, somebody else will do it. You know, there’re a lot of arborists in the world.’ So I took the tree down and, in so doing, I instructed the grounds crew and the people who were going to stuff this tree into a chipper to save most of it.”

The conversation and tree removal took place in August. By October, Tom had used some of the wood from the tree to make a piece for the woman, and brought it back to her. “I knocked on the door and offered this piece to the homeowner. She told me, ‘I can’t take this piece. I don’t have any money to pay you.’ So I said, ‘You’re right. You can’t pay me; this is priceless. Remember, it’s for your daughter.’ Then she said, ‘Well, I’ll take it on one condition,’ I said, ‘What’s that?’ she replied, ‘You make me another one and let me pay you for it.’



“That was the beginning of Respectful Transitions: somebody in this sweet spot of having an emotional connection to a tree and then wanting to pay me for something I’d make out of it.”

As a certified arborist, Tom can take down small to medium sized trees himself, but he says about 50 percent of the people he works with have a tree that has already come down, due to storm damage or previous removal for other reasons.



These days, he does have more and more people asking him to make something out of their ash trees. But he works with a wide variety of species, including, as a result of spending his winters in Arizona, things like olive wood and mesquite.

When working with species more typically found in his spring/summer/fall home of Minnesota, Tom said, “I love walnut because I’m one of the few artists who keep the bark on the tree. The bark makes the difference because it creates a colour separation

between the beautiful heartwood and sapwood layers. So, the middle of the tree is the heartwood, the darker shade; and then there’s the sapwood, the outer, lighter ring, in most cases; and then there’s the bark. With walnut, it’s like three shades of chocolate: you’ve got your dark chocolate in the middle, then you’ve got your white chocolate, if you will, and then you’ve got your milk chocolate of the bark.”





Each of Tom's pieces starts with a unique feature of the wood. "That's where I start the turning process. I see a feature that I've never seen in any of the trees that I've worked with before. I cut that with my chainsaw, then I bring it into my shop and I cut it on the band saw. I do a circular form of that one area that I've never seen before and when I put it on the lathe and start turning it around and peeling away the layers, when that happens it literally has never been seen by anyone before.

"When I find a feature like a previously pruned branch or an undulation or a branch coming right through the edge, and I happen to capture that, that then becomes the feature and I create the rest of the vessel around that feature."

Tom's background and skills make him uniquely suited to work with such features, he said. "Here's where my artist meets the arborist: By understanding the biology of what's going on in the tree, I can anticipate magic in these places that are disposed to creating magic inside a tree that has been biologically altered by

pruning, or by a storm, or by a bug."

Those insights also help him as he teaches and demonstrates to woodturners' clubs, at sites like Rockler stores and, most recently, at the Forces of Nature show at the Los Angeles County Arboretum. "It's the biology of the tree which will dictate the outcome on the lathe in some cases," he said, so he will incorporate into his demonstrations discussions of the physics and tree biology behind "the point where things can go wrong."

Awareness of such things can lead to better safety, Tom said – even though one of his "calling cards" is a technique that seems to be particularly dangerous. "I draw a branch through the edge of a vessel," he explained. "Why I bring it up is, it's such a dangerous operation that it should never be done, because you have this protrusion spinning around at such rapid speed that it becomes invisible. It's called a 'ghost image.' In my demonstrations, I absolutely exhort no one to try this at home because it's so dangerous.

"From there, I say, however, if you do exactly what I tell you, you should be able to do this without a problem. My three elements for turning are: safety, comfort and creativity, in that order, specifically. Only by understanding the physics and the mechanics of what could go wrong can someone safely approach a project using their creativity," Tom said.

He does, however, note that he's attempting to teach people around the country to duplicate his efforts, so that he can offer referrals and manage his own workload. "When I get an order for 100 pieces, there's no way I can make that many," he said. His goal is to have connections with tree care specialists and woodturners in various areas that can make special somethings out of downed trees in their local areas.

"I'll just connect the dots like that. However, I do have some people who say, 'I want the Michelangelo, I want the master; price isn't an issue because this is my most special tree.'"



One example comes from another of Tom's stories. "A gentleman called me up. A little bit of background story was, 20 years ago, he and his wife, when they got married, they planted a hawthorn tree. Ten years into their home and their marriage, the hawthorn tree died. They had to cut it down. He kept a piece – and, to my knowledge, I don't think he told his wife about it. But it was a very special tree nonetheless.

"Ten years after, which is coming up on their 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, he calls me and asks if I can make something for him. I usually didn't work with wood that's been dead for 10 years, but I said, 'What a heartfelt story for you to give something to your sweetheart on your 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary from this wonderful tree. We got together and I said, 'Well, when would you like this?' and he said, 'Well, today is Monday and our anniversary is Friday,' so I said "yes" to that.



"I got the wood on Monday; on Thursday, I delivered it and here's what he did: He held this vessel – it was more the shape of a scoop or a tray – in his left hand, and in his right hand, he went into his pocket and pulled out a little velvet pouch, and he opened it with his teeth, and then he poured 20 red crystal hearts onto the vessel and said, 'This is what I'm giving my wife tonight.'"

As Tom said, "I have stories replete with the emotional effects these have on people."

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