

Aspiring carpenters learn technique; result: unique products



By Tony Pearson

SIRCH Community Services believes that to solve social problems, sometimes you have to blend traditional social programs with innovative projects, some market-oriented. Thus a bereavement support program involves the release of butterflies. And a cooking training program, "Cook it up," ends up with healthy meals packaged and available to both local consumers and people in need. Their newest venture, entitled Works of Wood, or "WoW," is training local aspiring carpenters to be able to work in construction, or in SIRCH's latest social enterprise venture. The program, based out of the SIRCH Thrift Warehouse by the Kawartha Dairy on Highway 28, involves the development of unique wood products. One is the most visually appealing rain barrel imaginable. Another is a guaranteed critter-proof garbage box. A third is what is termed an obelisk ? a four sided trellis for plants, topped with a solar light. The prize of the collection is surely the harvest table, which embodies rustic elegance.

The trainees span a range of ages, and include both men and women. Interestingly, the older women noted that when they went to high school, girls were not allowed to take shop classes; instead, they were funnelled into Home Ec. One of the women recounted how she had once shown up for a construction job, and was immediately handed a broom and told that her job was to sweep up. Due to this, many women of that era lack basic DIY knowledge that is often needed when maintaining a home. Luckily there are sources such as [The How To Crew](#) that can help people gain skills to carry out repairs themselves.

Instructor Don Zilstra worked as a renovation contractor, as well as a machinist and millwright, before getting into teaching. He stresses the importance of mastering fundamentals, notably measurement. Some contractors have difficulty finding people who can easily read a tape measure ? in part, because while schools are on the metric system, contractors remain with the imperial system of feet and inches, he said.

Other elements to the skill set students will acquire are a grounding in the use of large power tools like a contractor saw and the ability to read blueprints. In fact, their final project for the course will be to design and build a product they will choose. Thus, another aspect of job readiness fostered by the project is team-building and teamwork. In addition, job safety is a constant theme; the students joke that the instructor asks them to show him all 10 fingers before they leave for the day.

Students see applications beyond the labour force for their new skills. One noted that she would now not only be able to perform renovations to her own place, she would also be able to assist others, like seniors, who could use a helping hand.

The project is also into recycling. Much of the wood that will be used comes from the Bancroft Window and Door company, which previously occupied what is now the SIRCH warehouse, and left lumber behind. Along this line, the project invites people who may have a pile of wood in their garage that they won't be using to contribute it to WoW. If people have power tools they no longer use, the same invitation is extended.

And if you'd like to see the rain-barrels and other project products, you're invited to check them out at the Thrift warehouse ? and if you like what you see, you can fill in an order form on the spot. You can also do this online.

SIRCH executive director Gena Robertson sums up the Trillium Foundation-funded project as follows: "Our hope is to have a thriving local business which generates local employment and income."

There are still openings at the Works of Wood class. If you are interested, give SIRCH a call by March 11, 705-457-1742.