



“Woodworking takes a little knowledge and skill, but it’s really easy to learn.”



GOING AGAINST THE GRAIN LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR TRADES TEACHING COMPUTER SCIENCE FOR THE ART OF WOODWORKING.

WorthEffort Woodworking is located @ 122 S. Edward Gary. Shawn Graham lays the bow saw down on the small work table he made from construction lumber and pushes his black-rimmed glasses up the bridge of his nose.

wortheffort.com Periodic symbols are painted in tan on a wall like ancient cave drawings. WorthEffort Woodworking founder and sole employee, picks up the simple bow saw he constructed from a thin piece of wood and metal. It’s an example of the history of the woodworking trade and its connection to early prehistoric humans, a reminder of the symbiotic relationship between man and nature.

“An Evening With Shannon ‘The Renaissance Woodworker’ Rogers.” The free event begins at 7 p.m. on June 14.

The self-taught Arlington native spent seven years as a computer science teacher at Clear Lake and Spring high schools in Houston.

It was there he saw the product of what he calls “A-type parents,” NASA engineers, rocket scientists, and the like, who had “white collar dreams” for their children, dreams that didn’t include teaching them how to swing a hammer.

Glazy-eyed youth, the kind fluent in HTML and JavaScript, were part of the reason Graham retired from grade school teaching and invested his pension in teaching how to create the old fashion way.

Whether it’s in the classroom or on the internet, Graham has been teaching woodworking, whether he knew it or not, for more than a decade. So, 10 months ago he opened the modest school that teaches teens and adults how to literally carve a niche for themselves.

“Woodworking takes a little knowledge and skill,” he says. “But it’s really easy to learn.”

The concrete floors of the one-room, 12-student schoolhouse in downtown San Marcos, which initially served as a grocery distribution center for Central Texas, are spotless now, as Graham carries a long, thin strip of pine wood to a workbench to prepare for an upcoming class.

Today’s lesson, part of Graham’s free Friday class series, is an introduction to recess carving, or in layman terms, how to carve a letter into a block of wood using a half-inch chisel and a mallet, which may sound easy, but for those who spend their days at a keyboard, it may lead to blisters. Splinters are always a hazard of the job, and Graham said pine is the prickliest.

That’s why Graham suggests going with the grain, a decision he made years ago that has led to his transition from computer science teacher to woodworker... and making sure the chisel used is sharper than a doctor’s scalpel.

“The definition of sharp is you can’t see the edge,” says Graham, a sharp man himself, who hasn’t been able to see the edge of his woodworking career since he began as a student at the University of Arlington.

He began his foray into hand tool woodworking by living in and restoring old “crack” homes in Arlington to help pay his 14-year way through college.

Now he’s on foot and online, giving demonstrations and selling his products at various farmer’s markets in Central Texas, including San Marcos and Austin.

Woodworking items that are built by hand, Graham says, can last well past a lifetime and can be passed down to future generations.

A stepstool with multiple shades of glossy, smooth tan stands on the cool cement floor of WorthEffort, waiting to be given as a gift by Graham to a woman who is pregnant.

“(The stepstool) goes in the bathroom, [where] she can sit next to the tub, bathe the kid. Then it goes to the sink, and the kid can reach the sink. When he’s old enough, it goes in the kitchen so he can go in the top cupboards, maybe drill the kid’s name into the bottom or something like that...” Graham says.

The train whistles in the background as Graham ponders the thought of the woman growing old and gray and being able to use the stepstool with her grandchildren.

So far Graham’s wager in San Marcos – that he could also attract students from Austin, San Antonio, and New Braunfels – hasn’t proven to be financially sustainable. He knows that the future is uncertain, like that of the stepstool, as WorthEffort Woodworking eyes a possible relocation to Austin.

However wood is strong and perseveres. He adds, “Wood is the original zombie: it remains alive even after it’s cut down.”