

Neighbors

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Hobbyist has his work cut out for him

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LAKEWOOD RANCH - When Bill Arnold's wife told him to make the bed, he decided on walnut and cherry wood to start with.

The Summerfield Lakes resident crafted the massive base, with curves and storage galore. He sanded and cut and glued the ash headboard together, even installing some rope lights behind the headboard.

"A little mood lighting," Arnold joked.

And most of it was done in his garage, a veritable workshop on wheels that he can rearrange to fit inside his pickup.

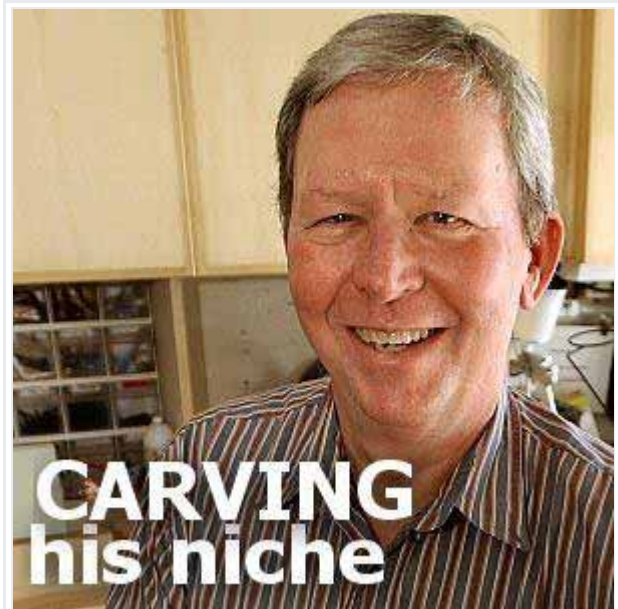
For five or six hours, five days a week, Arnold can be found in his garage, bustling with a mixture of sawdust and sweat as he cuts, sands and details his woodworking projects.

It's a hobby he started seriously pursuing just five years ago. But it's one that already has won him praise from the judges at the Florida State Fair. Arnold entered furniture pieces he had built in the Fine Handcrafted Furniture exhibition at this year's fair. All three pieces placed First in their respective categories.

"Bill is an experienced woodworker," said Adam Ross, president of the Florida West Coast Woodworker's Club. "He's one of those guys in the club who can offer a lot to teach our members. That's why we love to have him."

For all the attention Arnold gets, he recounts his journey to woodworking with a shrug. He grew up with his father dabbling around a wood shop and worked most of his life as a project manager and engineer.

He lost his job in the post-Sept. 11 economy and suddenly found himself with a lot of freedom. Having played around in the shop for years, he started out at a custom furniture company that furnished



BRIAN BLANCO -The Herald

Bill Arnold, a member of the Florida West Coast Woodworkers Club, creates award-winning wood furniture pieces from the garage of his Lakewood Ranch home.

upscale yachts.

Only five months in, he found himself the lead builder on a huge contract. He was hooked on woodworking and quit about a year later to work on his own.

He has since retired and found woodworking a perfect task to keep him busy.

"I had to find something else to do at home," Arnold said. "This is totally different from sitting behind a desk all day."

The job is physical and intense. Arnold marked off a piece of wood and placed it on his band saw to cut a curved corbel, a decorative support for a lamp. He inched forward along the blade, repositioning the piece just slightly along the curves, cutting and shaving the piece into shape.

"You've got to stay focused," Arnold said. "As soon as you get distracted from what you're doing, you could lose a finger or worse."

A few minutes later, he had a six-inch corbel ready for sanding.

Despite the intense concentration involved, the potential to lose a digit or a hand and the motor skills required for the job, Arnold said nothing relaxes him like woodworking.

"It's very relaxing," Arnold said. "You get to exercise your creative ability. I design the things I build for the most part."

His methods for creating his projects are unusual. Instead of drawing designs out by hand, he uses engineering software on his computer and prints it out. Then he uses the printouts to cut his pieces to exact measurements.

The projects are time-consuming, the tools expensive. But Arnold said you can't find better quality furniture in most stores.

"I guarantee you could go to the store and buy furniture cheaper," Arnold said. "But it's not as good. It's something that is truly heirloom quality."

Ross agreed as the two looked at Arnold's award-winning night stand.

"You can't find this quality," Ross said.

And with the quality and work comes a steep price. He said prices for hand-crafted furniture typically run from \$10,000 to \$30,000 for significant pieces.

Arnold suggested that anyone interested in getting in to woodworking take one key suggestion to heart.

"The first lesson is safety. Think before you do anything; plan every move," Arnold said. "Don't proceed if it doesn't feel right."

For those interested, the Florida West Coast Woodworker's Club is a good start, Ross said. The group meets at 7 p.m. the second Thursday of every month at 7948 Oak Grove Circle. The 60 or so members range from novices to professionals like Arnold.

For more information about Bill Arnold, visit www.bbarnold.com/

- For more information about the Florida West Coast Woodworker's Club, visit [www.floridawoodworkers .com](http://www.floridawoodworkers.com) or call 488-9164.

NAME: Bill Arnold

AGE: 60

OCCUPATION: Retired as a project manager and engineer

LOCAL RESIDENCE: Lakewood Ranch

BIRTHPLACE: Waco, Texas

FAMILY: Wife, Bobbie

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