

BUILDING BONDS

Woodworkers learn through their connections to the community

By Matthew Nerger

Since May 2013, the Baton Rouge Woodworkers Club has been helping area woodworkers hone their craft and connect with other woodworkers in the capital region. Starting with only 10 people, the club has since grown to a total of 62 members.

"We have monthly meetings," says Jim Landry, webmaster for the club, "usually the first Saturday of the month, from nine to eleven in the morning."

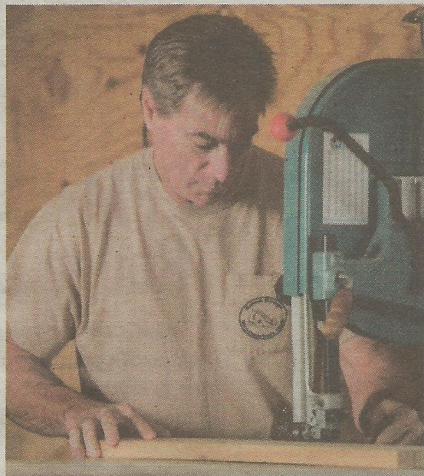
Meetings rotate between different members' workshops and consist of safety training, time for members to show projects they have been working on, question and answer sessions, and educational demonstrations of new skills.

"We have a new skill topic every month," says Landry. "In the past we've focused on cutting dovetails, sharpening saw blades, and tuning band saws. We have the one of our members who most knowledgeable in that topic do the demonstration."

The club has also worked on a number of community service projects—about eight or nine a year—including building bookshelves and nightstands for a local women's shelter and chests of drawers for a local homeless shelter, and helping build coffins for The Little Angels Foundation, a local charity that provides children's coffins to grieving families free of charge. The club has also donated projects to the Our Lady of the Lake's Children's Hospital and a veterans' organization in Hammond, for whom they built wooden footlockers.

"When we have a community service project, we set up voluntary teams," says Landry. "Three or four people will get together in one of their shops to work on it."

For example, when the club built nightstands for the women's shelter, they split into five teams of about three or four



people each, and each team built three nightstands. This allowed them to build fifteen nightstands quickly and efficiently.

"And that's where you learn a lot," Landry says, referring to this small team organization. "You learn how someone else does the woodworking—how they cut the wood, what tools they use. We learn a lot through the community service."

In fact, the club does a lot of its learning this way, working together to pass along each other's skills. After each monthly meeting, the club has freeform social time for members to meet and discuss technique. In addition, the club's website has a space for members make lists of their tools so that other members can ask to borrow tools they may not own.

In addition, the club takes time to get younger people interested in woodworking—to "develop the next generation," as Landry puts it. For the past two years the club has had a booth at the Baton Rouge Library's Maker Fair, where they've demonstrated the variety of objects that can be made via woodworking. They have also set up booths at the Iberville Swamp Life Expo, where they handed out member-made birdhouse kits to children so they get an early start with woodworking. But the club is not only looking to teach children about woodworking. Interested future woodworkers of any age are welcome to join the club.

The club also holds occasional woodworking classes for beginning and intermediate woodworkers through Louisiana State University's Leisure Courses program.

Members of the club come from a variety of skill levels—from professional woodworkers to retired hobbyists and newcomers to the craft—and a variety of ages—people from their twenties through their eighties. Anyone with an interest in woodworking is encouraged to attend a meeting, the next of which will be held on Feb. 6.

More information can be found at the club's website, <http://www.brwoodworkers.com>.