

Wood Carvers Group is powerful outlet for creative seniors

The Aurora Seniors' Centre's Wood Carvers Group was celebrated last week as their latest collective project, a wooden quilt, was formally unveiled at their John West Way base – but the Centre's busy woodshop is providing a powerful creative outlet for members all-year round.

The Wood Carvers Group is led by Mel James, an electrical engineer by trade, who first became involved with the Wood Carvers upon retirement at the age of 70. Encouraged by founding carver Fred Ash to get more involved, he succeeded to head the group upon Ash's death with a mandate to grow the membership.

That he has, and membership now tops approximately three dozen, with James estimating a 50/50 split in membership between men and women. In growing the club, he's also shared the burden by bringing on several new leaders.

'Just one person is dangerous,' says James with a laugh. 'There were two of us at one time, and then it became three or four, and it stayed that way for a while until we had training. The highest membership we've ever had is 35, but the pandemic messed us about quite a bit and we had other issues as well, now it's an issue of moving things back up. People get a little intimidated by trying to do one thing, but if we're all doing group things [and members can see each other's work] it gives them more encouragement. That is what I have always been pushing with everyone in this group – let's try to find something in common and that just gets the juices flowing. If someone is a little intimidated, we take the time to work with them and that is basically what this is about.

'I realized last year I couldn't keep doing the running of it, so I moved it into a flat management style, so there are six approved persons and (divided) into three groups: artistic group, which is this (the quilt-makers), the technical group, which basically does some of the details, and the social side. We can do all sorts of things. The problem is the bigger it gets, it's hard to organize it. We don't have the space.'

Long-time members Ana Khorramshahi, Danielle Burnet and Velta O'Leary who coordinated the wooden quilt initiative, agree it is both easy and rewarding to become involved with the group.

'Mel has a step-by-step program in place [that] introduces the tools, safety and the techniques and things just evolve from there,' says Burnet. 'It is a very progressive thing until they (new members) are comfortable, until they can go and come up with their own plan and their own ideas.'

All one needs to do is simply come in and try it, stresses James.

'The workshop is an incredible place, you have never heard so much laughter in your life' however, the workshop can feel intimidating and dangerous,' he says. 'But it is not dangerous. When you put a knife in your hand, [we will] say, 'If you follow rules, it's not dangerous.' Some people do break the rules, I have done it a few times, but it is a nice pastime.'

For more information on the Aurora Seniors' Centre Wood Carvers Group and myriad other activities underway, visit www.auroraseniors.ca.

By Brock Weir