

October's Featured Artist

It's All in the Hands.....by deborah fagan carpenter



“Orthopedics is like woodworking in bone,” he said. Dr. Jeff Justis made the decision to become a hand surgeon when a fellow medical resident pointed out the similarities between that specialty and Dr. Justis’ lifelong passion for creating with wood. Recognizing both as mechanical procedures, he realized that it was a natural fit, and dedicated his professional life to using his skilled hands to repair those of others. Forty years were spent at the renowned Campbell’s Clinic in Memphis, Tennessee doing just that.

An enduring passion for woodworking was sparked with the gift of a jig saw at the early age of ten. Armed with his first piece of woodworking equipment, he joined his father who was a dentist in pursuit of his own hobby, and the two learned much of the craft together. At the time of his retirement from medicine in

2001, Dr. Justis had become a master wood artisan.

A spacious home near Oxford, Mississippi is filled with countless examples of Jeff Justis’ woodworking expertise. The house was designed according to his and wife Sally’s specifications, and most of the trim work, mantles and bannisters were expertly fashioned by him. Nearly all of the wood furniture in the house is museum quality reproduction pieces he has painstakingly recreated, and in most cases, a miniature replica was made prior to the final version. A grandfather clock, sideboard, china cabinet and dining table are examples of the extensive collection of his handiwork.

One of his most spectacular woodworking achievements is a reproduction of a Stradivarius violin. Having built two guitars some years ago, Dr. Justis relished the challenge of crafting a violin. He purchased the plans for the instrument during a trip to England some fifteen years prior to its realization. Stradivarius likely tapped on the wood and could hear it when he had reached the proper thickness. Not musically inclined however, Dr. Justis had to rely on his blueprint to tell him what millimeter to



shave the wood to in order to achieve the proper tonal quality. A special apparatus was brought into his studio to assist him in the shaving process, and he also designed a piece of equipment dedicated to house and hold the violin during the carving.



The beauty and musical quality of the violin was debuted at a recent concert performed by his granddaughter, Sarah Beth. When she became a professional violinist, it gave him the impetus to finally construct the instrument. Sara Beth had the pleasure of presenting it to the world and, subsequently to own the cherished instrument. He was delighted to see it come to life in her gifted musical hands, the superiority of sound evident to even the most tone deaf in the audience.



The beautiful and organized studio of this master builder would be the envy of any artist. In his previous studio in Memphis he had worked on concrete floors, on which anything dropped would be damaged. The floors of his current workspace are recycled wood, which

he laid himself and which are kept dirt free by the dust removal system he also installed himself. The bottom floor of the spacious two-story studio houses wood, much of which has been salvaged from demolished buildings, and which is waiting to be transformed into some wooden masterpiece. While Strativarius may have had more of a musical ear, Dr. Justis has a real appreciation of classical music and so it is piped into the studio to accompany him as he works.

Woodworking has to share space in the doctor's heart for his other passion, building and flying small airplanes. A typical day for the good doctor is to spend his mornings in his studio and the afternoons at the nearby Oxford airport maintaining his

two small airplanes,
one of which he built.
He and his wife have
been all over the
world in the aircraft,
so he keeps them in
top notch condition.



The soft spoken

Dr. Jeff Justis has spent a lifetime healing the hands of others, and using his own
creating beauty and pleasure. His awe-inspiring talent, fueled by inexhaustible



passion has clearly
been bestowed upon
one who has used his
gifts to the fullest.