

## Wood Machinery Generates Good Retirement Income

By Lorn Manthey

When he was in his mid-fifties and working hard growing potatoes, Harvey Schmidt never imagined he'd be making money in retirement as a master woodworker. "I thought I'd retire and maybe make a few things in my shop, and then go fishing," Harvey says with a laugh. Those plans all changed when he started making replicas of farm machinery and selling them at craft shows six years ago.

"My wife and I couldn't believe how excited people were to buy these implements made from wood," Harvey says. "I went back to the shop and came up with new ideas and new toys, and its been full speed ahead ever since."

Schmidt now makes more than 120 different types of machinery from wood. Prices range from a few dollars apiece for small toys to more than \$150 for big implements. Kits for small items sell for \$5. His most intricate designs include a threshing machine, combine, road graders, backhoe, dirt movers, semi tractors, trailers and dump truck.

The detail on his machinery is amazing. Cylinders on the earth movers, combine and dump trucks, all made from different types of wood, lift and flex just like real hydraulic models. Different size pulleys on the combine and the threshing machine are solid wood with milled centers and dowel drive shafts. Rubber bands simulate the belts and actually turn the pulleys.

The combine has a working grain reel and a removable platform, a driver's seat with a working steering wheel, a movable unloading auger and a rotating chaff spreader. The drive wheels turn and the tires have notches that simulate lugs.

His threshing machine is built to scale, with an intake platform, movable pulleys and shafts, a grain auger and straw tube. The wood machine rides on wooden spoke wheels that Schmidt makes by hand. The evenner and long wooden hitch provides an extra measure of authenticity.

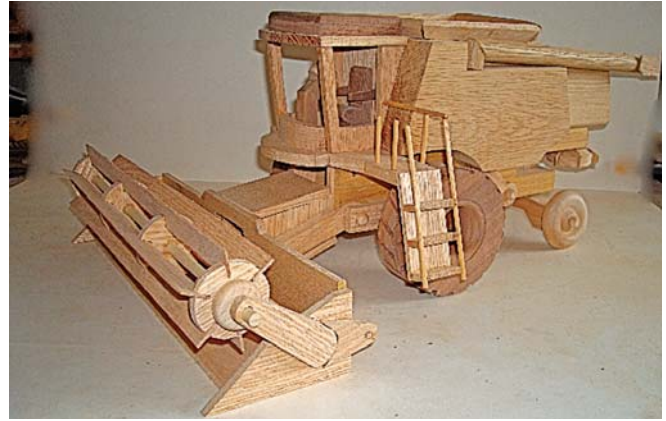
A self-taught wood worker, Schmidt is a master of tiny details and an expert practitioner. He took up the hobby in his late 50's as he was winding down a career in farming. "I built cabinets and furniture for five years, but there's too much pressure in that business," Schmidt said. Instead he turned to making much smaller items that took more time, but provide a great deal of satisfaction.

"I just love the challenge of figuring out how to make every single part," says Schmidt. That challenge is severely tested on his excavator, which has 360 parts, many of them moving. It took him nearly 60 hours to build. A companion backhoe took half as long and has more than 100 intricate wood tracks about 1 in. wide and 1/8 in. thick that Schmidt made piece by piece. He proudly pushes the machine across the table to show that the wooden tracks easily turn on wooden spindles and wooden drive wheels.

Schmidt uses 20 different woodworking tools for crafting his model equipment, including 9 routers set up with specific bits. His shop walls are laden with rough-cut boards cut from ash, white oak, red oak, walnut, blood wood and purpleheart. He's quick to point out that a 4 by 6-in. piece of 3/4-in. thick purpleheart, imported from South America, costs him \$62. "I use everything but the dust on those," he says with a laugh.

Bloodwood and purpleheart provide colorful accents for wheels, fenders, hoods and sheathing. The rich wood grain and color of his equipment is embellished with a thin coat of mineral oil as a preservative. Many of his smaller items such as farm toys, wagons and trains are left untreated so kids can play with them.

"I'm very careful about the materials I use," Schmidt says, "the wood is all native and natural, without any preservatives. I never use pallet wood and never use nails or screws that could hurt kids. The glues I use are non-toxic and approved for toys."



Wooden toy combine has a working grain reel, removable platform, movable unloading auger, and a rotating chaff spreader. Even the drive wheels turn.

Asked if he might slow down soon and not put in 40 and 50-hour weeks, the 72 year-old Schmidt is quick to point out two 5-gallon pails of wooden wheels waiting for equipment. "I get ideas in the night, and can't wait to start cutting and assembling," he says. "In the summer I'm up before dawn and out here working."

One of his most recent inventions is a folding field cultivator, built to scale for towing behind a 4-wheel drive tractor. The wings tilt, it has dual wheels, shovels and cylinders, just like the real machine.

"I build everything to scale starting with a few pictures, drawings on paper that I transfer to wood, and a lot of trial and error," Schmidt says. "Sometimes I'll build parts from cardboard to get the size and shape correct, then make them from wood. When I built this shop 10 years ago, I told my wife it was going to provide a good income for us, and it sure has," says Schmidt.

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Harvey Schmidt makes more than 120 different types of toy machines from wood.

## Low-Cost System Turns Logs Into Furniture, Fencing

Building log furniture - or making rail fences - is less expensive and easier with the Logman tenon cutting system from Les Smith. Plus, you might already have the tool to do the cutting in your shop - a heavy-duty 1 3/4 hp or 2 hp router with a 1/2-in. collet.

Smith came up with the idea after he started building log furniture and started teaching the skill to others. It made him nervous to watch beginners trying to hold and operate heavy drills fitted with expensive cone-shaped tenon cutters. He figured there had to be a simpler way.

He offers a couple of options. Logman I comes with carbide bit, a holder for the router, and two high-density polyethylene (HDPE) wood guides that make 5/8, 1, 1 1/2 and 2 in. dia. tenons. The router bolts to the tenon maker, which is secured to a workbench. The guides are held in place by wing screws. Turn on the router and push and turn the log through the hole in the wood guide to make as long a radius shoulder tenon as you want or to make a dowel.

At \$149, Logman I has been on the market about five years and has helped many customers make their own furniture and fences, Smith says.

Last year he developed a tenon cutter to

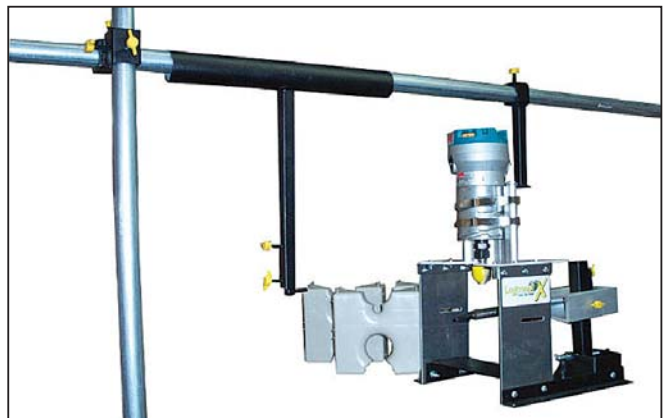
work with larger or bent logs. "It can do more than any tenon cutter out there," Smith says. "The new Logman X allows you to make tenons with different shoulders and tapered tenons. It automatically aligns the tenons, and you can put a tenon on a log up to 8 in. in dia."

In addition to using the wood guides (including a 2 3/4-in. guide), the stand has a threaded rod feature. Depending how it's positioned, it can make straight or tapered tenons. Holes are drilled in both ends of the log. The rod holds the end to be shaped, and the other end is held level on a log holder with a slide made from conduit. Various bits can be used in the router to make radius, straight or other types of shoulders on the tenons. The logs can be turned by hand or with a cordless drill. Logman X sells for \$239. (A less expensive version without the wood guides is available for \$159).

"It puts tenons on really bent logs, which has always been difficult," Smith says, noting that the log holder keeps the ends level.

The ability to make larger tenons on bigger logs is unique to Logman, as is a wrap around shoulder tenon, which butts up and "locks" the tenon in a hole. Smith shows how to make it and other style tenons in videos on his website.

Smith also sells a book, "Build Your Own



Les Smith developed this tenon cutter to work with larger or bent logs. Overhead frame holds logs while router, mounted vertically on table, cuts tenon.

Log Furniture" that includes 10 projects and offers ideas on setting up a business selling furniture.

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Tenon cutter lets you make tapered logs with different shoulders and angles.

