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Spring Forward Edition

Muletown



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**IN THIS
EDITION:**

Events & Non-Profit
Directory

Pg. 3

Coloring Pages

Pg. 6-7

Coloring Page
Winner

Pg. 9

Kids Page

Pg. 10-11

Crossword & Sudoku

Pg. 14



**One-of-a-Kind
Instruments**

Pages 12-13

Photo taken by Sarah B. Gilliam



Accessory
Trends
Pages 4-5



Figures From the Past
Share Their Memories of
a Life-Changing Civil War
Pages 8-9



BANJO AND DULCIMER MAKER CRAFTING ONE-OF-A-KIND INSTRUMENTS

Contributed by Robyn Barber

After over 30 years in architecture, Santa Fe woodworker, William Lester, carefully crafts banjos and mountain dulcimers within his self built workshop by hand.

William began a lifelong love of woodworking over 50 years ago as he watched and learned from his grandfather who built furniture in his Nashville home-based workshop.

An early retirement in 2015 allowed William the time he had longed for to be able to focus on his craft - and today, he is able to spend his days, and many

nights, building instruments for others.

He often uses the wood he has been able to source from local farms. In 2009, 60 mile per hour straight line winds toppled many trees throughout Williamson County, including a working farm near Leiper's Fork.

"I was able to get a buddy to help me clear the field for that farmer, and from those downed trees, I have milled hundreds of board feet of the most beautiful hardwood that Tennessee has to offer."

After years of air dry-

Chestnut Grove STUDIOS

I am one-half of an Artisan Couple living in Santa Fe, Tennessee. While I have had a life-long passion for woodworking, my wife has fostered a love for creativity. We are now nurturing our crafts in our combined workshop known as Chestnut Grove Studios.

I am a native Nashvillian. After graduating from Auburn University with a degree in Architecture, I worked primarily in commercial Architecture for over 30 years before designing and building our studios and tiny house on our small farm in Santa Fe. I spend my days creating sawdust while building custom designed banjos and dulcimers.



ing, that wood has made some beautiful looking and sounding banjos and dulcimers.

Other instruments have been shaped with wood re-purposed from a torn down barn, a disassembled antique staircase, and other unique sources.

He says the instruments can take from one to three months to make. The banjo is a lot more labor intensive than the mountain dulcimer, but I truly enjoy making both. I am currently experimenting with the construction of a new instrument called a pocket mandolin."

The first banjos William made were constructed by block stacking the rim. A process where three or four layers of 8-block octagonal rims are stacked and glued together, and then turned on the lathe.

The newer banjo rims and dulcimer sides are now steam bent.

Like his instruments, many of his tools are hand-made. He crafted his own steam box for bending

wood from a wallpaper steamer.

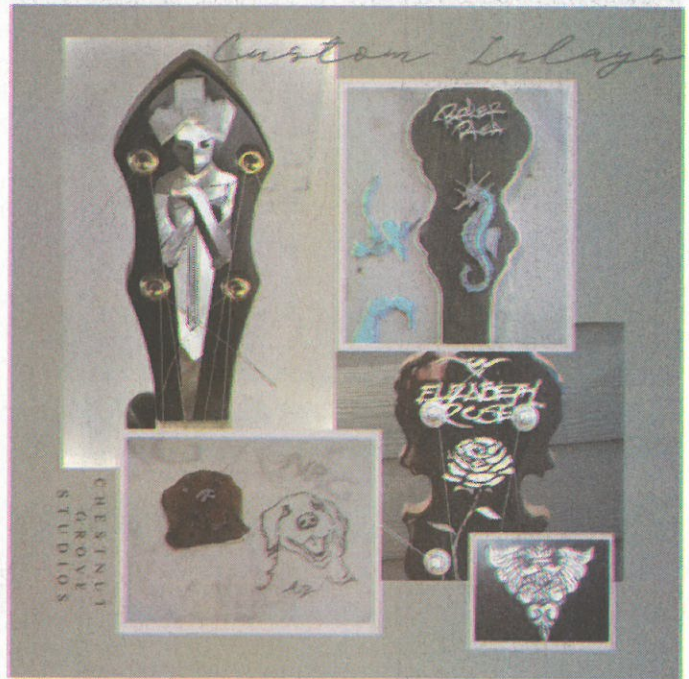
In addition to the wood aspects of his banjos, William also carves the pearl inlay designs into his instruments. The peg head of a recent banjo William made featured an inlay of the "Garden Sprite," a large sculpture designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1914.

William's workshop is full of tools, some of which have been passed down for three generations.

"There is something really satisfying about using a tool to shape an instrument knowing that my great-granddaddy also used this same tool in his shop."

William primarily sells his instruments through word of mouth, although he does post in-progress photos on his Instagram account @ChestnutGroveStudios to generate interest in an instrument or connect with other makers.

To learn more about William or his instruments, go to his website, ChestnutGroveStudios.com



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