

Cuckoo for clockwork

Keeping time flying a full-time endeavor for Greenspring resident

by Gregg MacDonald | Staff Writer

Former mechanical engineer Lloyd Lehn of Annandale officially retired 12 years ago, but you'd never know it.

Today you can find him in his own personally designed and constructed workshop, the "Cuckoo Clock Hospital" at Greenspring retirement community. He also has his own Cuckoo Clock Hospital website.

Lehn has been fixing cuckoo clocks for 20 years: oiling; cleaning; replacing and adjusting movements and music boxes; and making a variety of other adjustments.

Lehn retired in 2003 after a 35-year career as a mechanical and manufacturing engineer with the Department of Defense. He moved from his home in Annandale to Greenspring 18 months ago and set up shop in his new apartment.

"It's basically a 7-foot by 7-foot closet," he says.

Lehn receives many referrals from local clock shops and on average, says he works on one or two cuckoo clocks per week. "Most clockmakers won't work on cuckoos," he said. "It takes a lot of trial and error work."

Lehn has more than 50 tools specifically for working on cuckoo clocks but "the best tool for a cuckoo clock is a sledgehammer," he jokes.

Lehn says he first attended a clock repair class offered through Fairfax County more than 30 years ago. He began working exclusively on cuckoo clocks about 20 years ago. Much of Lehn's business is local, but he has also repaired cuckoos from all over the country, sent to him from Idaho, Illinois, Florida, Missouri, Nevada, Tennessee, and Washington.

The largest cuckoo clock he's repaired was three-feet tall and currently lives in a Georgetown restaurant. "It took me more than 10 hours just to clean it," he said.

Because cuckoo clocks are a specialty even among clockmakers and repairers, Lehn uses a patented timing device called "MicroSet" and its associated computer software program to record, analyze, and adjust cuckoos. "It's sort of like a cuckoo clock EKG," he said.

According to Lehn, the esoteric technological device provides detailed information and precise measurements regarding the timing and beat of a clock. These metrics and diagnostics allow him to properly adjust the cuckoo.



Tin Nguyen/Fairfax County Times

Dr. Lloyd Lehn, a retiree living at the Greenspring senior community in Springfield, applies his mechanical engineering background to fixing cuckoo clocks in his home workshop.

Most of the cuckoos Lehn works on are German-made Black Forest cuckoo clocks with movements made by Regula and Hubert Herr. He avoids estimating the monetary value of any cuckoo clock because he says most people value their clocks for personal reasons. “Ninety-percent of the value is related to emotional attachment,” he says. Lehn says he joyfully recalls one customer’s tearful exuberance after hearing her grandmother’s cuckoo clock working for the very first time, and says it was a great feeling. “But I’m not afraid to take money,” he adds.

He currently stays busy with a steady stream of customers who find him through his website, www.cuckooclockhospital.com.

“Working on cuckoo clocks used to be an outlet for me,” he says. “Now I paint as an outlet because I’m so busy.”

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