

Jerry and Lee DeMorat team up in successful woodworking business

BY BARBARA MILLER
Staff Correspondent

TROUT RUN — "If it's wood, it's good," says Jerry DeMorat of R1 Trout Run, Lycoming County. It's a slogan Jerry and husband, Lee, take to heart.

In addition to Jerry's energetic involvement with the local 4-H and Extension offices, active participation in school and church affairs, and a host of other interests, Jerry and Lee started Beechgrove Woodcrafts four years ago.

Although Lee has a full-time job working for the phone company, Jerry and he spend nights and weekends in their shop making various wood items to sell.

The DeMorats live with their daughter, Christie, 10, and son, Leo, 8, in a 100-year-old farmhouse situated on 10 acres of land north of Williamsport. Jerry, who grew up in this rural area, has merely to look out a window to glimpse her childhood home a short distance down the hill. Although her father was a timberjack, many of her

relatives owned farms nearby where she occasionally helped with farm chores. She was also a member of 4-H. Lee, the son of a carpenter, is from the Wilkes-Barre area.

It was through the impending birth of their daughter 11 years ago that Jerry became involved in woodworking. Lee had been working steadily to finish a crib, cradle, and changing table for the new arrival. But time was getting short.

"It was getting closer and closer to my time," Jerry recalls, "so I helped with the baby furniture."

After that the DeMorats continued to construct as they had need, making such items as a trestle table, a gun cabinet, and occasionally restoring an old piece. With few exceptions all their furniture is either of their own handcrafted origin or pieces they have restored.

Soon they began receiving requests for a wooden bread box with a punched copper insert which they often made and gave



Lee and Jerry display their popular bread box and spice rack. Both items feature the popular heart panel design.

away as a wedding gift. And so their business began. Thus far, Jerry says, they've sold about 50 bread boxes, and it still remains one of their most popular items.

The DeMorats joined the Williamsport chapter of the Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen in 1982 and were "juried" in 1983. To become a juried member of the guild meant their work had to meet stringent requirements. After becoming a juried member they were allowed to exhibit their work in a craft shows and participate in marketing seminars.

Ideally, Jerry says, she would like to spend four hours a day in the shop, but on an average it usually works out to two hours. Then after Lee gets home from work, has supper, and rests an hour, they work together in the shop from 8 until 11 o'clock.

"Everything is a joint effort," Jerry says.

Concerning the actual construction of an item though, Jerry notes, "We have a division of labor. He cuts out and assembles and I do the finishing."

Jerry also does the copper punching, an art she became interested in soon after she started with woodworking. She draws her own designs—anything from butterflies and hearts to geometric patterns—and uses a nail to punch them into thin copper sheets.

The sheets may become part of a bread box or another popular item such as the "pie safe." A pie safe, Jerry explains, is a shelved cupboard used to store pies. It often had punched copper or tin inserts in the doors which allowed air circulation while disallowing flies. Today, Jerry says, pie safes may be used to store a variety of items.

According to Jerry, their wood business has done well enough to have completely equipped their shop with an array of woodworking equipment. They have jointers, a lathe, various sanders, a drillpress, and several saws.

Although their woodworking operation does provide an extra income, the main ingredient of their business is enjoyment, says Jerry. They developed their woodworking operation in part because they wanted a retirement business. They hope to travel to craft shows all over the United States some day.

Jerry says she particularly enjoys working with wood, "Because when I'm finishing a piece and staining it, I can watch the beauty of the wood come out...I also like the satisfaction of a new design that works out."

Lee nods assent to this, noting that when they've finished a piece that has turned out well, "We just sit and look at it."

Lee says he gets satisfaction in putting together "good solid joints and something that's going



This pie safe is one of the DeMorat's most prized pieces, and one, Jerry says, most often admired at shows.



Lee and Jerry work side by side to assemble a toy box.



Jerry punches copper into an apple design.

to last for a while."

Looking to the future, the DeMorats say they plan to convert a chicken barn into a studio showroom and arrange home parties. To promote sale of their merchandise, they plan to show slides or movies showing how their products are made at parties.

Jerry became a 4-H leader of the Cogan House 4-H Community Club four years ago. The club currently has 35 members. Jerry teaches sewing and for the past two years, she proudly reports, several of her proteges have progressed to the county fashion review and five to regional competitions. One brought home a blue ribbon from regional competition. Lee also teaches woodworking.

During the past year the

DeMorats hosted the annual Lycoming County 4-H picnic; they also hosted an IFYE student from the Netherlands. Jerry is currently chairman of the Lycoming County advisory board, which plans 4-H activities on a yearly basis.

Jerry thinks 4-H is a terrific program. She says it is a "hands on" learning experience where members take things learned in school and apply them. Understanding of such things as fractions increases dramatically, according to Jerry, when a member must measure a 5/8-inch seam correctly to complete a dress or learn to read a tape measure properly to do a woodworking project.

Parental enthusiasm is one

(Turn to Page B4)

Homestead Notes