

England Oaks Resident Woodworkers Carve Out Unique Friendship

Gerald Turner and Richard Heath have two very important things in common - they love England Oaks and they love working with wood.

"That's all we need to be happy," Gerald said with a laugh.

As a young boy, growing up on a farm, Gerald built his own toys: first a wooden tractor, then a miniature barn. As an adult, he shared his carpentry skills for 10 years as a volunteer with Laborers for Christ, building churches around the country, before settling in at England Oaks.



Richard and Gerald show off their work.

Richard, on the other hand, began woodworking in high school and made it his lifelong hobby. Richard moved to England Oaks about 11 years ago and Gerald followed a few years later. As neighbors, they struck up a conversation and realized they shared this passion for wood and watching it become something special.

"We came to the craft from different backgrounds," said Richard, a US Army veteran, who spent time in the communications industry. "But our skills seem to complement each other. We learn from each other."

"Richard is a very skilled woodworker," Gerald said. "Over the years, I've picked up a lot of tips from him." The friends often share tools and spark each other's imaginations when it comes to projects. "What I like best about our woodworking relationship is sharing ideas," Richard said. "We mostly work separately but we support each other."

Nowadays, Gerald's custom creations—most of which he gives away to friends and family—include book shelves, cutting boards, TV cabinets, clocks made from repurposed cedar, and even a super-sized dog house for his granddaughter's five dogs.

Richard specializes in platters, chopping blocks, canes and his favorite project ... dough bowls ... wooden bowls and troughs used for kneading dough that he turns on a lathe.

Both men have dedicated workshops right on campus, a definite perk to living at England Oaks.

“For me, woodworking is quiet time when I can create pretty things,” Richard said. “It’s an artistic expression making something from raw lumber.”

And while Gerald still loves building toys, these days they’re more likely to be rocking-horses for his great-granddaughters.