



From The Shop



The newsletter of the Lehigh Valley Woodworker's Guild

Issue 08.2007

Upcoming Meeting Information

Next Meeting: August 21, 2007 (3rd Tuesday!)

Location: Lehigh Co. Senior Center
1633 Elm Street
Allentown, PA

Speakers and topics:

- **Product Demo – Universal Jointer – Hank Von Hollen**
- **Great moments in cinema – Craig Bentzley shop tour – Narrated by Craig!**

June Meeting Highlights – Jim Leamy and custom planes.



Jim and Beth Leamy. Very nice people, and a good team.

Sometimes you hear about demonstrations and you figure – What does that have to do with me? Like when I heard that Allen Powell had arranged for a presenter on plow planes, I asked myself “what the hell is a plow plane, how many guild members use whatever these are, and this is going to be a real hoot!...”. Well, just before I sent out last month’s newsletter, I did a Google on Jim Leamy. Found his web site. Looked at the planes on it. And hurriedly re-opened the newsletter file and went to type in “these are planes like you have never seen..” and it got all jumbled. Naturally, having had people who worked for me when I was somebody doing all my proofing, I did not catch it and it went to

press. But – THESE ARE PLANES LIKE YOU HAVE NEVER SEEN. And if this newsletter got the same painstaking attention to detail that Jim Leamy provides to his plane reproductions, it would win a Pulitzer.

Our summer meeting vacationers impacted turn out, and that is a shame, because you missed a wonderful presentation by a meticulous craftsman. If you like working wood, and you think back to the days when working wood did not mean turning on the air conditioner ahead of time when you expected to work in the shop, having routers and 3 hp table saws and planers, but a hodgepodge of hand tools, which themselves needed care, you marvel at the work that was done in times past. You marvel at the people who did that work and the effort it took to generate results like we bang out without breaking a sweat. These hand planes / plow planes dredge up thoughts like that.



The first hand plane reproduction Jim ever made.



All of these planes had something special and unique. The common element was excellence in construction.

The detail in the work is painstaking, the results are not just tools, but works of art in their own right. I recall when I was 18, I remember my father once talking about a mandolin and how they were made in such an artistic way. He did not play any stringed instrument, but sort of admired the construction. So for his birthday, I spied a beautiful mandolin in an antique store near Prudential Insurance Company in Newark, NJ where I worked, and bought it for him. When he opened it, everyone sort of looked at me and said to themselves "What the hell did he buy that for?". But Dad looked at it and took it for what it was – a beautiful piece of workmanship that could sit in his room and be admired for what it was. Doubt that he ever even tried to play that thing.

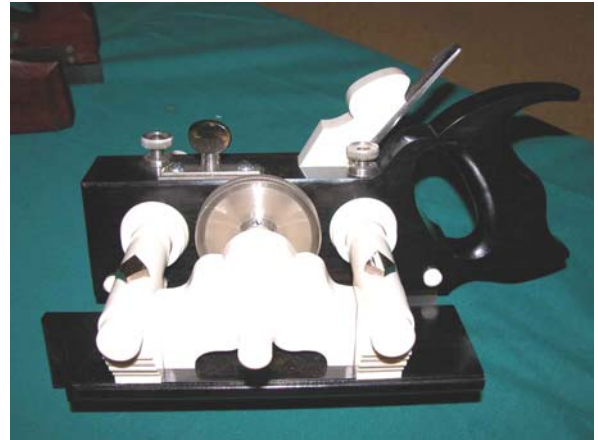
These planes that Jim makes could be admired by anyone, woodworker or not. The workmanship and attention to detail is staggering. A person I sort of admire when it comes to attention to detail is Craig Bentzley. That probably makes me dysfunctional, but it is what it is.. Craig was admiring the planes and I looked up and said "These are really something, eh?" He empathically agreed, and added "He keeps getting better every year, too.." Paul Anthony, another woodworker known for his appreciation for detail beyond the norm, was impressed by these planes.



Another look at this initial hand plane replica. Every detail makes this plane not look new, but like a well preserved original. This one is modeled after the M. B. Tidey plane, which was originally engineered as an incredibly complex and expensive tool designed to execute a very simple operation. Consequently, there are only a few of these planes in existence. .

Jim spent a few years in the USAF – like 1964 – 1994. He did some furniture making as an amateur woodworker and then working professionally for a furniture maker in Downingtown. He was interested in antique tools dating back to the early 1980's, eventually got interested in planes, and built a reproduction of a hand plane for himself. This led to his becoming particularly interested in some of the more esoteric plane designs and he began to make more complicated planes and use more exotic materials, and building them for sale. He eventually quit his job

making furniture, something he said his wife was more than a little concerned about, and started making plane reproductions for a living. Speaking of his wife, Beth, she accompanied him to this presentation. That is unusual, for a speaker's wife to join him at a meeting, and very nice, I think. She is clearly very proud of his work. Lovely people.



Ebony and Ivory. Reproduction of Sandusky Ebony and Ivory Presentation Plane sold at auction in the fall of 2004 for a record price.

Anyway, Jim soon learned that his work was admired, and also that people will pay well for faithful reproductions of antique planes, so perhaps he could make a decent living at this. There are many sources of information on antique planes, but not everything is on the internet. In fact, most of the data he needed was not available in any modern form. Obtaining old planes for measurement was also difficult, as many owners just did not want their prized originals reproduced. Sometimes he has to resort to working off of photographs, measuring things in the photo that he knew the size of and then extrapolating that to other measurements in the photo, right down to teeth on a gear. Get an idea, reverse engineer it.



Paul Anthony inspecting a plane.

For all planes, no matter how he got the specifications, he makes up a set of full sized working plans. He decides on any special materials that he needs to use. He decides on any special tools he needs to make in order to make the planes. Originals sell for tens of thousands of dollars, so getting a hands on session with these is not always easy. Sort of "Sure, I never met you, but if you wanted to take my 1938 Rolls Royce silver cloud out to Ritas for some Italian ice, fine by me... Here's the keys...."



The ultimate plow! The original was presented to James Montgomery on his retirement from the Ohio Tool Co. in 1857. Rosewood, ivory and sterling silver.

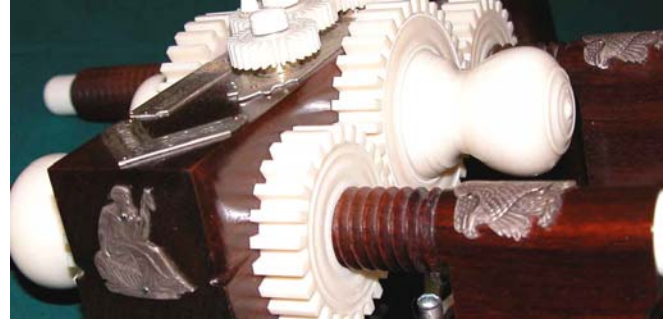


The badging and engraving look original and look aged. Pardon the photo quality.

Jim makes all his own metal parts except for castings. He has never been formally trained in metal work or as a machinist, yet his work is amazing. He was not formally trained as an engineer, and took a drafting course in High School, but this facet of his work is equally impressive and detailed.

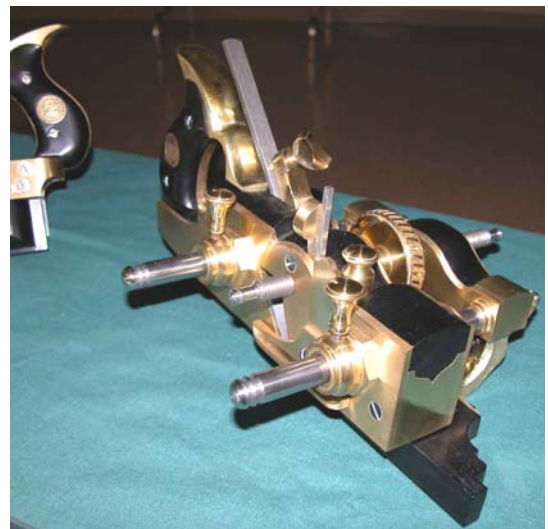
Each plane has a story, and Jim knows them all. He knows the maker, the company, the genesis of the company and design, all these facts. His presentation went into much more detail than my humble note taking capability was able to capture. One example he pointed out was a plane made by the Ohio Tool

company. He built his from photos, as he could not get a sample. It took him 5 years of thinking and measuring from photos to decide that he could have a go at making this plane. Paul Anthony asked him if he ever got a chance to measure an original and compare it to one he made from photos. He advised that he eventually got to measure his model against an original, and apparently it was "pretty darned good", according to Jim. Maybe 1/16th difference max. He made all the gears himself. The white stuff is actual ivory (let's not get into a frenzy about that. You don't like the use of ivory, do not buy the plane..), emblems are all hand tooled out of silver. He also uses artificial ivory. I think he said ivory costs like \$200 a pound.



Badges are hand made out of solid silver.

Jim advised that there is evidence as far back as ancient Egypt that plow planes were in use. Here in the states, there were small differences between a plow plan made in New England, England, and mid Atlantic states prior to 1850, but after that they more or less came together. Hand made plane companies went out of business altogether about 1925, with the Sandusky plane company being one of the last ones. The demise is due more or less to the birth of the Stanley planes that were banged out of factories as part of the industrial revolution.



A picture cannot do justice to this work. Unique ebony and brass center wheel plow. Reproduction of a one of a kind plane. This baby weighs a whopping 10 lbs. + and has a real presence in your hand.

How far do people go to get original hand planes? Jim spoke about a fellow who bought the entire contents of a building just to get the hand plane that was part of the parcel. The plane he acquired, I believe, was eventually sold for \$113,000.

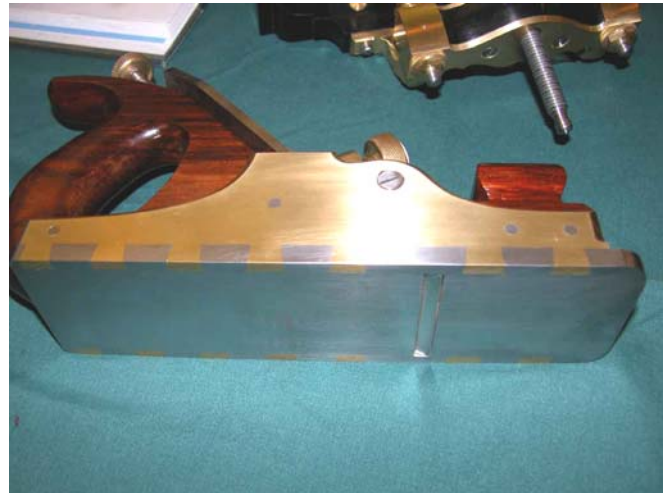
Who made planes? Well, there were companies like Ohio Tool that made their livelihood making planes, and others where a fellow just made them, like one Kentucky plane maker Jim mentioned, who also made fishing rods and pool cues and other things. Over the years, companies who made planes had their patents expire or just went out of business, leaving others to pick up their designs.



A gear that Jim made for the brass hand plane. Like jewelry,

One plane that Jim reproduced was made almost entirely of brass. It was sold at a NJ auction for \$4500, but they let him take it apart and take measurements of it prior to the sale. Nice of them. He built a fantastic looking reproduction. As stated, he is not a professional machinist, is self taught, and has 3 milling machines, 3 metal lathes, and a shaper. He does not do his own casting, but makes use of a small foundry near his home. He specializes in plow planes – he advises that there are other people who make conventional plane reproductions better than he does. He has made a couple of conventional planes, and his examples of that he brought were at least as impressive as the plow planes he makes.

His plow planes are not just pretty reproductions – he tests each one before it goes on the market. The woodworking that he does do is done mostly with hand tools, and the plane bodies he makes are done for the most part with hand tools. Most of the finish work on his planes is done with a scraper. Power tools are used just to rough out wood.



Jim does not make a lot of conventional infill planes because he says there are other people who do it better. Yeah, right! Look at the metal dovetail work.



As stated, Jim says there are a lot of other people who make this style plane (called an Infill plane) and some do it better. OK, Jim, I agree. I'd love to take this horrible looking tool off your hands... Just a beautiful tool, an I would bet it works as well as it looks.



Some more infill planes.

His planes sell for a wide range of prices. Some are \$2,000, others \$20,000. Average price for his work is in the \$2500 - \$5000 range. There is also a difference in price for a plane made from real ivory vs. one made from artificial ivory. It takes him 3 – 4 weeks to make a plane, and he will only make 12 – 15 of each reproduction. He uses cocobolo, ebony, boxwood. Ebony is messy and ivory stinks, he advised! Apparently in the good old days, the materials that a plane was made out of was an indication of the stature of an individual in the woodworking world. Regular folks had planes made from beech, but higher paid craftsman has planes made from rosewood and such. Back in 1850, a rosewood plane could command \$15 to \$16 – a lot of money.



Tap tap tap. Brass taps that Jim made for his work. He makes his own tools in many cases. These are as nice as his planes. Attention to detail....

Jim even makes his own taps, of brass, because it cuts better than steel. This surprised most of us. He advised he has never had to re-sharpen a brass tap. For his regular planes with the steel and brass dovetails, he hand cuts the dovetails, first in the brass and then in the steel. He holds them together with crazy Glue and peens then a little. He uses sandpaper on granite to flatten them, although his surface grinder does a pretty good job at the outset.



Yet another reproduction. Each one has a different look and feel and Jim uses many different types of materials

with an equally outstanding result. An example of the earliest of the Ohio Tool Company Center Wheel Plows.

For finishes, he like water soluble varnish, and likes the American General finish in particular.

Jim approached his who presentation in a sort of matter of fact way. I think he views the work he does as precision work with only one right way to do it, and he goes about his work with that mantra. The rest of us marveled at the items he brought. The meeting broke up and almost everyone stayed well after the presentation was over asking questions, picking up these planes (the brass one weighted a lot – no idea how much, but a LOT) and admiring the work up close. The wood was made to look old. The emblems were made to look worn. Every detail was painstakingly attended to.



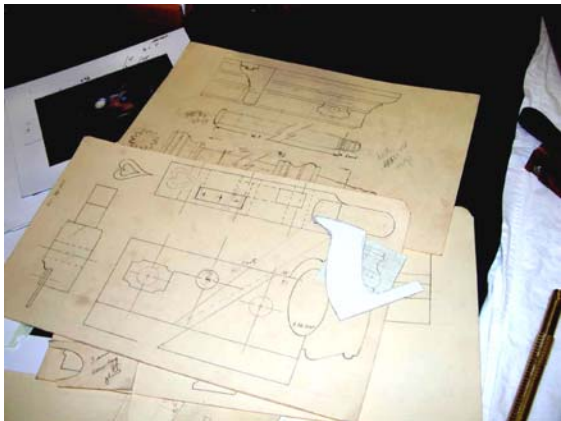
The work on the bottom of the planes is like fine woodworking. This one was originally made by E.W. Carpenter of Lancaster Co., Pennsylvania. Carpenter is noted for his exaggerated nuts and wedge



Another shot of the bottom of a plane. Great craftsmanship.



Do it yourself plane kit. Kidding. This is one disassembled.



Detailed plans are a must for each plane, and Jim does the same diligence to these as he does to the planes.

Quite candidly, members were all uniformly impressed by the artistry of Jim Leamy. I for one marveled at the perfection (my eye is not a trained one, but enough experts were at the meeting) of Jim's self taught woodworking, metalwork, engraving, finish work, engineering, attention to minute detail. The likes of Craig Bentzley and Paul Anthony, guys who have shown us their own strict work ethic, were impressed. On a personal note, Dave Bolash, who I know for a long time, was very taken by Jim Leamy's work. Dave not only is an accomplished woodworker, he also teaches jewelry making and has a great deal of metal working knowledge. Plus he is a first class fault finder!! (had to say that, Dave!).

Summing it all up, if you missed the meeting, this write up and these photos cannot come close to seeing and holding one of these planes and meeting the man. Woodcraft magazine featured Jim in a July 2006 issue. I am sure that their writers and photos are much better than my humble efforts (actually my digital camera malfunctioned in the middle of the meeting and some of the photos are blurry and overly light, but I edited them as best as I could). If you want to know more about Jim, see if you can get your hands on a copy. His web site and contact info follows.

<http://www.jimleamyplanes.com/>

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Email: leamy@ptd.net

Drag and Brag



Love the selection of materials.



.Nice! Very nice.

Steve Kirk at it again. Beautiful bench. Cherry and spalted maple, with some fine looking joinery as well.

And the Woodcraft winner is...

I do not remember. I was me and also Andy for that meeting and it is not easy being both.

Woodworking Contest at October Meeting!

We want to get an idea of how many folks will be entering and you should know by now, so be prepared to let us know at the next meeting.

Steering Committee Meeting Notes

I was there this time and here goes!

- Blocks. We asked for a show of hands on if we should be doing community projects and majority agreed. We asked if blocks were appropriate and easy, and everyone agreed. We provided instructions. Now – Allen Powell will be asking on how we are doing, so if you are making them or need material to make them, sing out at the meeting.
- Treasurers report provided by Andy and accepted at meeting. A couple new sets of dues in and a speaker fee out.
- Lou Supina got some folks from Lehigh Valley Hospital to do a shop safety presentation in November. This should be REALLY IMPORTANT to all of us.
- Update - For the Nov presentation we have Scott Shimandle from OSHA and Dr. Basil Dolphin from LVH Healthworks. Scott will speak about machine safety and Dr. Dolphin will speak about the negative effects of wood dust and vapor from finishing chemicals.

Nice job, Lou – as usual.

- Ken and Judy Muth will be contacting a chair caning person and also a furniture maker as we start setting up 2008.
- Russ Reinhart gets e-mails from folks who want our member list for mailings on their products. We do not give this out, but Russ will talk about this at the meeting. His proposal is that we give you the names / mail ids of these offers and you contact them.
- We are looking for folks who can donate some prizes. If you know anyone, send them our way.
- Party donations – you want a decent buffet or a trough of oatmeal and a bunch of spoons?
- Taking at meetings – we have ONE meeting. If you want to have a side conversation and it happens to need to take place between 7:30 and 9:30 on the 3rd Tuesday of the month, take it outside or into the hallway.
- Katrina – Allen Powell has 3 tables committed for Katrina. Anything else you'd care to build would be appreciated. The healing there is ongoing.

Wood Specials

SHADY LANE TREE FARM
 Louise & Mike Peters
 5220 Shimerville Road

Emmaus, PA
 610 965-5612 Please call
FLEETWOOD LUMBER & FLOORING
 BILL BURKERT
 27 Rapp Rd.
 Fleetwood, PA
 610 944-8364 Please call
Member discount 5%

Bailey Wood Products, Inc.
 441 Mountain Rd.
 RD#2 Box 38
 Kempton, PA
 610 756-6827

Woodcraft
 Pkwy Shopping Ctr.
 1534 Lehigh St.
 Allentown, Pa.,18103

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Note!! See specification sheet for blocks at the end of the newsletter!!

2007- 2008 Meeting Calendar:

Month	Topic	Speaker
August 21st	Product Demo – Universal Jointer Bentzley shop tour video	Hank von Hollen Craig! Who else?
September 18th	Carving	Frank Rauscher
October 16th	Annual Woodworking contest	Anyone and everyone
November 20th	Scott Shimandle from OSHA and Dr. Basil Dolphin.from LVH Healthworks. Scott will speak about machine safety and Dr. Dolphin will speak about the negative effects of wood dust and vapor from finishing chemicals.	
December 18th	Annual Holiday Party	Members and families
January 2008	Tentative – chair caning / shaker tape	
February 2008	Jesada Cabinet Template routing	Ken / Judy Muth
March	Tentative – furniture construction	

NEXT MEETING – Tuesday, August 21st, Starting at 7:30, sharp. Allow time to arrive and be seated before start time.

Location: Lehigh Co. Senior Center

Topics:

- **Demonstration – the Universal Jointer by Hank Von Hollen**
- **Great Moments in Cinema – Craig Bentzley Shop Tour Narrated by Craig!**