



ToyMakers of East Lake

"Making Smiles One Toy at a Time"



Toy Stories

Summer 2017 by Dan Pearch

ToyMakers are talented. Don McKerrow has been a long-time ToyMaker who specializes in a unique, non-toy type of woodworking; *Intarsia*. This medium consists of very precisely cutting out intricate shapes from varying woods of selected colors and grain patterns. These pieces are then meticulously assembled to produce amazing pictures. These works of art have always been very popular at our ToyMakers Silent Auction fund raiser, which takes place in early November.

Then, over three years ago, we were joined at ToyMakers by Matt Harper, a student at East Lake High School. Matt had experience working with a scroll saw, from his family's home workshop, and expressed an interest in learning how to craft *Intarsia*. Thus began a special relationship grounded in the love of woodworking, and the sharing of knowledge by a craftsman with an apprentice. Today, Matt produces works that are of such high quality, they are hard to tell apart from Don's! Although Matt will technically be a Senior in high school this Fall, he will be attending classes at St. Petersburg College, and earning college credits.

Many students volunteer at our shop, either for toy making or learning to repair bicycles with our Bicycle Ministry. The volunteer hours they accumulate with ToyMakers pay dividends when it comes time to apply for admission to a college or university, since many institutions place a premium on community service.



Partner Profile: Guardian Ad Litem Program of Pinellas and Pasco Counties

Sometimes it becomes necessary for a child to be removed from a home or setting, for their own well-being. That's when the court system gets involved and the Guardian ad Litem Program is appointed to protect the best interests of the child. Seven days a week, in three courtrooms in Pinellas and Pasco counties, children appear to have their personal circumstances evaluated. Ms. Mariela Ollsen, Circuit Director for the program, explains that this can be an emotionally stressful time for a child. "A simple wooden toy, which they can roll along the floor, can be a real "ice breaker". They usually don't have much that they can call their own when they are removed. It's heartwarming to see their eyes light up." After a child has been placed, either in a foster home, with a relative or non-relative, or possibly back in their own home, a GAL volunteer will sometimes take a toy in with them during a follow-up home visit.

Ms. Ollsen stresses how grateful she and her staff are to ToyMakers for the toys that are furnished to her program. They can often produce a smile.....when smiles may be hard to come by. For those who have a heart to become an advocate for children, you can learn more about the Guardian Ad Litem Program by visiting: <http://www.herotoachild.org>.

www.toymakersofeastlake.org