

Senior men create a place where men can socialize without pressure

By Glenna Turnbull

“So, tell me about yourself?”

Chances are, if you haven't yet retired you'd start answering that question by saying, “I'm an architect,” or “I'm a pilot,” or a carpenter or mechanic or whatever else you work at for a living. That's because in today's society, occupations play such a big role in how we identify ourselves and others. It's also, however, why so many people struggle after retirement.

“In Kelowna, statistically this year there will be five suicides of seniors and four of those will be men,” states Art Post, president and a founding director of The Okanagan Men's Shed.

isolating themselves. The goal was to create a place where men could go hang out, work on projects, share a cup of coffee and socialize without pressure. “There are over 1000 'Sheds' in Australia, with over 100,000 men involved,” says Art.

The Kelowna based Okanagan Men's Shed was the second in Canada, and first in BC to open its doors using the same key principles. “In Australia they describe it as, women will talk face to face with other women any place, any time, whereas men talk shoulder to shoulder to the object on the table.” In other words, men find it easier to talk while working on a project, so if you're sand-

build something,” says Art. “The kids get to (hammer in) all the nails and walk away with a toy they can say, 'I made all by myself'.”

Other projects they've helped create that have a ripple effect in benefiting the community include shaping pieces for birdhouse kits for seniors in recreational therapy at Cottonwoods and toolboxes for kids to assemble for Father's Day. “We've also been asked by one of the churches in town to build 'blessing boxes' to put around the community where people can put food into them for those in need,” he says, pointing to the large wooden cabinet that is nearly finished.

Most of the wood used



Trevor Baxter, Art Post, Lloyd Nelson and Dale Acott are just some of the guys you might meet at the Men's Shed



Art Post, president of the Okanagan Men's Shed in Kelowna

“With voluntary or forced retirement, empty-nesters find themselves underfoot with their wife telling them to get out of the house and do something,” notes Art, “and they can feel lost and isolated. That isolation can lead to depression and in too many cases, to suicide.”

The Men's Shed is a program that was started in 1996 in Australia after government health services identified the problem of senior men self-

ing pieces of a birdhouse or taking apart an engine, you might talk casually develop a conversation that wouldn't otherwise happen.

Walking into the Okanagan Men's Shed, the “object on the table” they're currently working on are pieces for toy-sized wooden paddleboats that are powered by elastic bands, destined to be built by children at the public library. “The idea is, we get kids and parents working together to

in their projects comes from mill ends donated by Gorman Bros. The saws, lathe and woodworking tools that fill the shed were all donated by a man who'd had to close down his woodshop when moving to a retirement facility.

For new member Lloyd Nelson, it was when he spotted the lathe that he decided to join the Men's Shed, noting, “I always loved working with a lathe.”

And for Trevor Baxter, he

decided to join after having spotted the Men's Shed's traveling trailer parked outside Prospera Place on Canada Day. He saw what they were doing and thought it looked interesting. “So, I wandered over and now it looks even more interesting,” he smiles.

While some of the men who drop by the Men's Shed are already familiar with woodworking equipment, others have never even picked up a hammer before. Dale Acott, secretary and director of the local Men's Shed recalls, “We have one man who, we taught him how to use the drill press and he drilled all the holes for the boats. He was elated as he'd never even used a screwdriver before.”

And therein lies the beauty of the program: it draws in men from all walks of life and through mentorship, they are able to teach each other all sorts of things and along the way, have a chance to talk.

“We have people here with various expertise,” says Art. “We have a couple of auto mechanics so if a machine needs to be repaired, they have the ability to take it apart and put it back together again. Another fellow has a background in furniture making so he can help someone like me who was self-taught to learn how to do it quicker and better.”

Among the 40+

members, others have backgrounds in electrical engineering and technology. “They're setting up a computer-controlled router,” Art notes, “and they've got a 3D printer.”

While there are no signs on the door stating “No Girls Allowed” like you'd find at a boys clubhouse, the question has been raised: are women allowed? Art replies, “The long and the short of it is, yes, but...” then he tactfully tells a story of the reverse nature. “My wife belongs to a stitching group. I walked in to pick her up one night and there must have been 75 women inside talking up a storm when I opened the door. But as soon as I stepped in, they all got quiet. Because the topics they were talking about were not for my ears.

It cuts both ways.”

Membership has been purposely kept at an affordable \$20 per year and the Okanagan Men's Shed is open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9AM to 3PM and Saturdays from 9:30AM to about 3PM.

Currently located at 555 Fuller Avenue, they are in the process of searching for a permanent home so it's best to stay up to date by following their website. They also have a trailer geared towards offering a traveling 'shed' to reach more communities in the Okanagan in the very near future.

For more information visit their site at www.mensshed.ca or you can call 250-717-1575.



Dale Acott shows off one of the completed paddle boats kits they create for children to build with their parents.