

Caning student, teacher cherish friendship

By CARLA THOMPSON
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Clarence R. Berger and his wife, Verna, are well versed in the four R's: rush, reed, rattan and rawhide.

Chair caning and furniture repair is the subject they've learned to master under the tutelage of Dan L. Nauman, who now is more friend than teacher.

"We work together like father and son," said Nauman, eyeing his former pupil with obvious pride and affection.

Nauman met Berger 10 years ago when Berger brought him a chair to be caned. "He said he'd teach me. Then he kept sending work over and inspecting it," Berger said.

"Pretty soon there was no room for anything in the house, even the kids," Verna Berger said. "Then he started in the garage. Now there's no room for the cars." Nauman admits that his pupil has gone far beyond him. "They do a lot of stuff I've never heard of. That's beautiful work," he said, inspecting an intricate hand-worked pattern.

By day, Berger is an employee of a lumber firm, but at night and on weekends he is busy repairing and maintaining antique and modern furniture, a business he hopes to make full time.

Hand caning is the province of Verna, who learned the art from her husband, then moved on to master Star of David, lace and spiderweb patterns she claims no one else in the Portland area can do.

Machine caning and lacing chair seats with rawhide, rush or rattan is the job of Berger, who says it takes strength to pull the fibers tight enough.

Both cherish their special friendship with Nauman, who says Berger is the only one of his students to take up caning as a business.

At the impressive age of 102, Nauman is old enough to remember the days when bullrushes were used exclusively instead of the synthetic fibers in use today.

He also remembers being six months too young to enlist for the Spanish-American War and being told by a doctor in 1898 that he had two months to live, due to an accident in a machine shop.

"And here I am," he said.

Beaverton Mayor Jack Nelson claims Nauman is the oldest person in Beaverton who holds down a job.

Nauman figures he's taught the art of caning to at least 100 people in the Portland area. He still works at last two hours a day at his shop on Old Scholls Ferry Road, down the road from the Bergers.

He also repairs furniture, duplicates turned spindles and rockers, and makes small cabinets to order.

Sometimes furniture will arrive looking like a jigsaw puzzle. Nauman recalls piecing together a couch brought to him in the trunk of a car.

He says he put it in a box in his workroom and labeled it: "Too much loving. This was a couch."

He's outlived three wives and looks back fondly to the memory of his last wife who married him when he was in his 90s and died after 4½ years.

So far, he's managed to remain single, but added, "When you write this up, please don't mention Leap Year. It's in 1984, you know."



LIKE FATHER, SON — Dan L. Nauman (left) and Clarence L. Berger share interest in chair caning

Staff photo by CLAUDIA J. HOWE