

GETTING INTO THE GROOVE



Photos by JT LOVETTE / FOR THE NORTH COUNTY TIMES

Above, Cody Ackerman (center) planes a piece of wood to fit into this groove as classmates John Philp (left) and Kurt Ackerman (Cody's father) look on during a timber-frame project at the Vista Antique Gas & Steam Museum on Saturday. This wooden mallet, below, was one of the traditional tools used by students in a Palomar College timber framing class to assemble a stage at the museum Saturday.

Palomar College students build stage for antique museum

ERIKA AYN FINCH
FOR THE NORTH COUNTY TIMES

VISTA — In hard hats and jeans, students from Palomar College clapped and cheered at the sight of their final project being hoisted into the air by a forklift Saturday afternoon. It was sort of an old-fashioned barn-raising, but for a grade.

More than 40 students from the college's timber-frame construction class gathered at the Antique Gas & Steam Engine Museum to erect their masterpiece: a 38-foot-long stage to be used for the museum's annual bluegrass festival. The stage was the culmination of a two-week course that taught students some of the oldest construction techniques in the world.

"They (the museum) didn't want a modern-day stage, but something from the 1700s or 1800s," said Chris Feddersohn, the class's instructor. "They heard about our previous five classes through word of mouth and asked us to construct the stage. We didn't have anything else in the works and I wanted a community project, something that would make the community a better place. This way, the students can come back and visit."

The stage consisted of 8,000 board feet of Douglas fir — primarily from Oregon and Washington — and 250 pegs made of white oak. The boards were fitted with



300 mortise-and-tenon joints and held together with the pegs, Feddersohn said.

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Students from as far away as Michigan decided to winter in North County and take the class. Instructors from Texas, Washington and Ohio flew out to assist Feddersohn. They worked eagerly Saturday, eager to see the results of their efforts.

"This is pretty cool," said Noah Elhardt, 18, a home-school student from Thousand Oaks who came to North County to take the class after hearing about it on the Internet. "I was a little nervous this morning because if we cut anything wrong the joint would be wrong and the whole building would have been delayed. This is the grading of the final exam, so to speak. We are putting together and building something and others will see our work through future generations."

Elhardt's friend and fellow home-school student, 17-year-old Cody Ackermann of Valley Center, said the process of cutting the wood was the most rewarding for him.

"It was more of a sense of accomplishment finishing the last tenon, when I saw the beams done," Ackermann said, who was taking the class with his father. "That's where I felt a sense of accomplishment. I knew the people in the class, and I knew we could get this all together."

Ackermann wasn't the only student taking the class with a relative. Ray Cataline came out from Michigan to take the class with his daughter and son-in-law, Michele and Brad Becker of San Marcos.

"I've done things as small as a postage stamp holder but it's amazing to do something this large," Cataline, a retired woodworker, said. "It's from one end of the spectrum to the other."

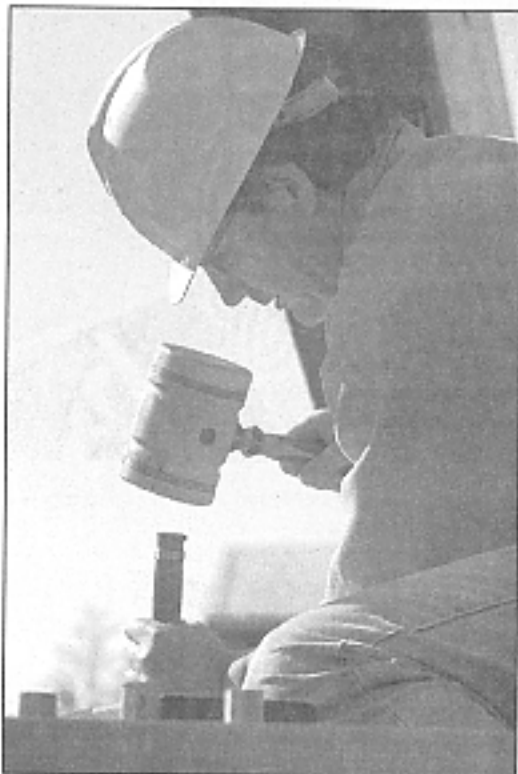
The Beckers brought along their Staffordshire bull terrier Pollywog while they worked on the building. As they took a lunch break, Michele Becker said they took the class because they had an agenda.

"Our dream is to some day build our own timber home on some land," she said. "It was also a way to bond with my dad and husband. It was a daunting program, no doubt, but I have a higher respect for timber framers now."

Feddersohn said the stage would not be painted but left its natural, oil-finished color. At the end of the day, the class placed a pine tree at the top of the roof of the stage as a symbol of good luck.

"It's a blessing," Feddersohn said. "It's a way of thanking the forest for giving us the trees and wood for building and a way to keep the building safe for its life and the lives of the people in it."

Dale Fox, a student in a Palomar College timber framing class, uses a traditional wooden mallet to strike a chisel as the class assembled a timber frame stage at the Vista Antique Gas and Steam Museum on Saturday.



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