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September 8, 2005 San Jose, California Since 2003

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Photograph by Sean Penello

Cutting Edge: Almaden resident Craig Colvin, owner of The Sawdust Shop, proudly displays a cabinet and clock made by his students. The Sawdust Shop provides both aspiring and experienced woodworkers a workshop away from home.

Sawdust Shop a fantasy fulfilled for woodworkers

By Sarah Holcomb

The Sawdust Shop in Sunnyvale is bringing aspiring and experienced carpenters in the Bay Area out of the woodwork.

The shop, which opened its doors in June on Oakmead Parkway, boasts a 3,000-square-foot retail area and a 4,000-square-foot workshop for anyone interested in carpentry.

Owner Craig Colvin, an Almaden Valley resident for 10 years, said he wanted to provide a place where people who wanted to learn about woodworking could take classes and where experienced wood workers could work on their projects and procure supplies.

The idea came to him about a year ago when he was showing some friends

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a telescope he made out of wood. "A lot of my friends said they would love to make their own telescopes but they had no access to a shop," Colvin said.

So Colvin did something about it.

The business is unique. So unique in fact, that Campbell and San Jose could not accommodate it. Both cities told him they were not zoned for such a business.

San Jose gave Colvin the option of applying for a permit to rezone a property, but said that that could take more than a year. Colvin said he didn't want to pay rent for a year to wait for the rezoning process.

Sunnyvale allowed him to have the industrial and retail areas, and also a use permit to allow the classes.

Offering courses in woodworking was one of Colvin's goals from the beginning. He has nine different classes at his shop, the most popular being the beginners course, Fundamentals of Woodworking. In this class, students work on a wall cabinet or a mantel clock, which requires the use of all the machines in the shop.

The class also emphasizes safety in woodworking, as do the other classes, Colvin said.

The classes are held on evenings and weekends and are taught by Mount Pleasant woodshop teacher Vic Hagman. Colvin said these classes are meant to accommodate complete novices who may have never worked with wood before.

Other classes include basic joinery, surface decoration and kitchen cabinet construction.

In the workshop area, Colvin has the machines that many avid woodworkers may have in their garage or workshop, but he has enough extra space to allow him to have larger versions of those machines, and thus do larger projects. For example, there is a 20-inch planer as well as a 22-inch drum sander.

Benjamin Johnston, a Los Gatos resident, used a machine in the workshop to make the rockers for a rocking chair he is building for his pregnant wife. He said that while he has a lot of woodworking machines at his home, he didn't have a drum sander large enough to finish that part of his project.

Colvin also invested in a table saw, made by Saw Stop, which has a sensor that detects human contact on the blade and automatically stops the blade and lowers it below the table surface to prevent serious injury.

The workshop area has large tables to work on, storage lockers and larger storage areas available for customers to rent if they don't want to take their projects home with them.



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The retail area includes instructional books, tools, safety eyewear, lumber and wood stains.

Memberships are offered and are available on an hourly or monthly basis at prices ranging from \$65 per month for a year-long, unlimited membership to a \$200 payment for full access to the shop for 10 hours, usable in half-hour increments.

The 10-hour blocks come in handy for clients such as Johnston, who wants a place to supplement his workshop at home.

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