

The Wood Carver

Joe Coleman is a busy man. An average week will find him on the tennis court two mornings, then in the billiards room learning 8-ball from the “pros”. This has paid off as his and Joe Agee’s names can be found on the plaque in Archie’s Tavern as couples winners in 2012. This year, he teamed with Hank O’Neil to win the spring putting contest. Joe and his wife, Sylvia, play duplicate bridge, as well.

Mid-October signifies the beginning of Joe’s busiest time of the year as he is Chair of the committee for the Staff Appreciation Gift Campaign. This entails sending a letter to all residents explaining the program, soliciting donations, preparing the gifts and distributing them at a staff party in early December.

So what does an octogenarian do in his free time? He carves figures from basswood. Following Joe’s retirement at the beginning of the century, the Coleman’s spent ten years traveling in their RV through the forty-nine states available by highway. While wintering in Fort Myers several years ago, Joe joined a local group, The Caloosa Carvers, and learned the basics of wood carving. He has several books from which he gets patterns as well as detailed instructions on how to achieve the distinctive features of his carvings. He began with eight heads for bottle stoppers. An important part of caricature carving is to get the correct proportions of a face and then proceed to make it humorous and charming. Interesting features, such as a large nose, teeth, hands or shoes, add to the appeal of the figures, some of which are created in a Scandinavian technique called flat-plane carving.

His tools are many, but essentially they are knives with different size blades and a number of gouges. The completed product is then painstakingly painted. Joe has projects in varying stages of completion, so it is interesting to see how the work progresses. While he carves, he listens to audio books, so there is not a wasted moment. Oh, yes, if he ever just sits and relaxes, he practices on his harmonica.

Story written by --- *Mary Bieber*

