

GENUINELY HOME: WEST VIRGINIA IN THE NEW YEAR

WONDERFUL WEST VIRGINIA

Special Issue 2010





Wooden toys continue to have a place of honor under the Christmas tree. Photo by Steve Shaluta

"I'm a toymaker at heart."

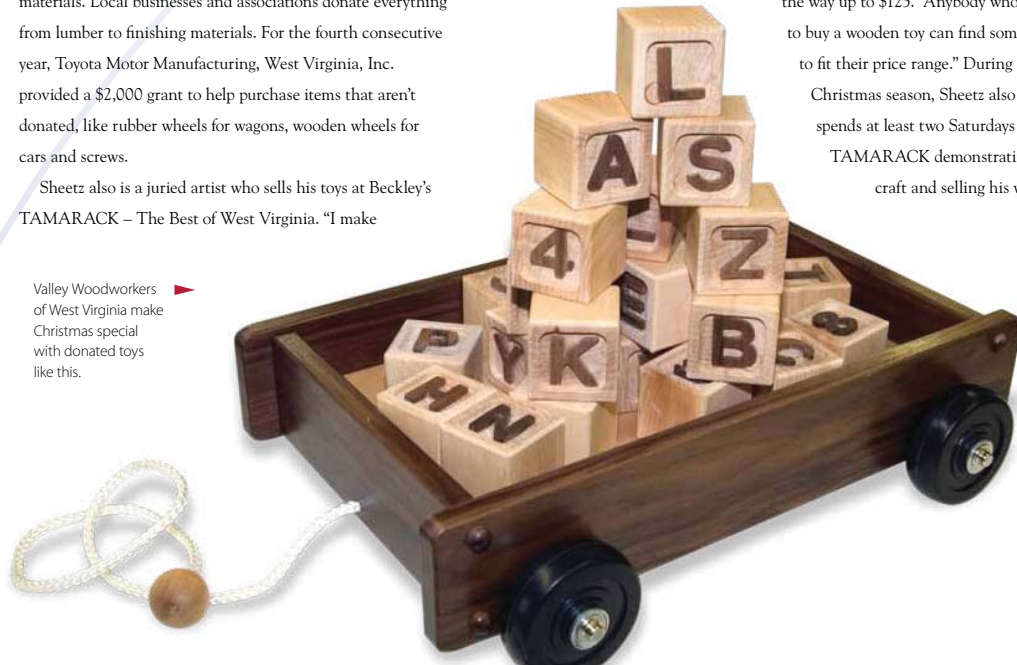
Wooden toys won't outsell electronic ones this Christmas, but they still have a place of honor under the tree. Woodworker Andy Sheetz has handcrafted toys for nearly two decades. "I'm a toymaker at heart, that's where my joy is. I love coming up with toys. I can and do make furniture, but I don't get the joy and the thrill out of it like I do with seeing my toys come to life."

Sheetz is one of at least 20 members of Valley Woodworkers of West Virginia, Inc., who contribute their time, skills and products to make Christmas morning special for hundreds of Charleston-area children. In 2009, the wood-crafting club donated nearly 900 items to the Salvation Army, including doll cradles; alphabet blocks with wagons to hold them; toy cars; traditional red wagons; rocking horses; and "puzzle" rocking chairs that invite children to take them apart and put them back together anyway they like. "The chair is made in such a way that the kid can exchange the left side for the right side, take the back and turn it around or turn the seat upside down, and it will still go back together. It's very cool, there are no lefts or rights or ups or downs."

With few exceptions, the toys are built from donated materials. Local businesses and associations donate everything from lumber to finishing materials. For the fourth consecutive year, Toyota Motor Manufacturing, West Virginia, Inc. provided a \$2,000 grant to help purchase items that aren't donated, like rubber wheels for wagons, wooden wheels for cars and screws.

Sheetz also is a juried artist who sells his toys at Beckley's TAMARACK – The Best of West Virginia. "I make

Valley Woodworkers of West Virginia make Christmas special with donated toys like this.



Ron Snow

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Andy Sheetz, toymaker Valley Woodworkers of West Virginia, Charleston



two different types of toy cars, an airplane, a rattle, a teeter totter powered by magnets, a spinning top, a ring-toss game, a toy tool kit with little wooden tools, a set of blocks and a four-car train." In June of 2010, that four-car "choo choo" won the West Virginia Landmark Award at the 2010 Rhododendron Festival for the product that best represents West Virginia.

"My products range in price from \$7 all the way up to \$125. Anybody who wants to buy a wooden toy can find something to fit their price range." During the Christmas season, Sheetz also spends at least two Saturdays at TAMARACK demonstrating his craft and selling his wares.



Steve Shaluta

"Andy is one of our favorite demonstrators here at TAMARACK," said Marketing Director Cindy Whitlock. "He makes traditional wooden toys that last through your children's and grandchildren's lifetimes. Andy does a great job with a high-quality, highly valued craft."

Whether you want to take the small step of introducing an old-fashioned wooden toy under the tree this year or harvesting mistletoe from a tall tree, investing in the long-term project of growing your own chestnuts, or going all out and immersing yourself in the Main Street Christmas experience, you and your family can do it all here in West Virginia. 'Tis the season to celebrate homegrown Christmas traditions. Enjoy! 🍷

Leslie Fitzwater is a public information specialist with the Department of Commerce. Christmas is one of her favorite times of the year. And, yes, she still believes in Santa. Contact: leslie.c.fitzwater@wv.gov