



Timber is Kirkwood man's frame of reference

Artisan uses skills to span river, house poor

by Joan Decker
New Era Correspondent

Kirkwood timber framer Anthony Zaya is living proof that your talents can take you a long way.

In fact, just this summer, they took him to Guelph, Ontario where he participated in a wooden covered bridge raising.

But the Guelph Bridge was hardly the first benefit project that utilized Zaya's craft. Two years ago, as part of a Timber Framing Guild conference, he worked with York Habitat for Humanity volunteers on a project in Hanover.

Frames were raised for two houses in eight hours. In just 64 hours, over 600 volunteers completed the two houses.

For Zaya, it was a very special opportunity.

"The York project allowed me to provide the fruits of my craft to two families who otherwise would not be able to afford housing," said Zaya. "This experience was the most unique experience I have ever had."

Zaya is a member of The Timber Framers Guild, which is comprised of 750 members. The Guild began donating their services two years ago during the Habitat project.

The craft of timer framing is not new.

"Timber framing is a method of building structures by connecting large timbers to one another by the use of various joints," explained Zaya.

This, he said, produces a long-lived structure.

"The Pagoda and the Golden Temple in Japan are both timber framed and date back to the sixth century," he said.

One reason for his interest in timber framing was his fascination with the longevity of the wooden structure.

"I had an interest in



Former industrial arts teacher Anthony Zaya of Kirkwood demonstrates the art of timber framing.

permanent structures. I don't mean 30-50 years, but rather 300 to 1500 years," stated Zaya.

Zaya was attending the eighth annual conference of the Timber Framers Guild of North America when he donated his time to work on the Guelph Bridge project.

The 144-foot bridge was constructed over a five-day period by hundreds of people attending the conference. Over 700 timbers were shaped by hand to make the covered structure.

The bridge spans the Speed River in downtown Guelph, Ontario, and provides a vital link in that city's network of walking/bicycling paths.

"The chance to work on a 120 foot free span wooden bridge was irresistible to me," said Zaya.

According to Zaya, weather conditions have taken their toll of covered bridges. There

are fewer than 200 of them remaining in New England, a few in Eastern Canada and only one other left standing in Ontario.

Timber framing is not easy. It is both heavy and exacting work.

Working with an eight-inch square piece of oak that's 16 feet long and weighs 900 pounds, the framer must use awls and blades for accuracy. A pencil line is not exact enough for the angle cuts that are needed for the joints because of the precise tolerances.

Zaya gets his wood locally, he said, because "Pennsylvania has the best white and red oak in the country."

Framers in other states are envious of the quality of timbers produced in this state, he added.

Zaya began working with the craft first as a designer, then as a business partner in 1986 with Woodbutchers Timber Framing, Inc. All of his work is custom.

"We do not want to be a mass production shop. We are small and proud of it," he said.

Zaya received a bachelor of arts and a master's degree in industrial arts from Millersville University. Before becoming a professional timber framer, he taught industrial arts.

He's conducted workshops through the Lancaster Campus of the Harrisburg Area Community College, and this year he's going to offer a workshop at Millersville University, where he'll seek to do another benefit project.

"We hope to find a need for a small timber frame structure. During the workshop we will construct it to benefit the community," said Zaya.

Whatever the structure might be, one thing is for sure—it will last a long, long time.