

He turns dead animals into relics, furniture

By Susie Rollins Singer
staff writer

Jack Gumbetter stuffed an awful lot of pigeons before he tackled a elephant or lion.

Recalling his boyhood, the 50-year-old Gumbetter remembers stuffing birds, skinning squirrels and painting fish "dozens of times" before getting it right. Learning by trial and error, Gumbetter became a perfectionist. He turned his passions into profits, then graduated to a sophisticated "clientele," becoming a professional taxidermist who specializes in African animals.

"I'm the only one (taxidermist) licensed to bring birds or feathers into the U.S.," he said. "I've got state, federal and agricultural licenses. And work with the interior department to bring in fish and wildlife."

Today, Gumbetter's stuffed deer heads and fish hang above dozens of mantels, while his elephants, lions, bobcats, zebras, antelopes and other safari animals can be found in hobby rooms, museums, zoos, universities and Troy's Outdoor Education Center.

FOR 25 YEARS Gumbetter has worked out of a small shop on Rochester Road, with a back room filled

with papier mache-like animals, tanned hides and dead fish waiting to be painted.

"To a newcomer, it's a fascinating amount of clutter whose origins stretch far across the Atlantic. To Gumbetter and his wife, Marlene, it's routine."

"Everything becomes part of life. Nothing is unusual," he says when pressed about his most exciting and, unique projects.

"Well, I am working on a lion here, that's sitting down. That's pretty unusual. Most of them are standing up or leaping over a log," he said.

Each stuffed animal is a one-of-a-kind piece, Gumbetter explained as the song "Second Hand Rose" played in the background. When African animals are used, they are shipped from the jungle skinned and partially tanned. Gumbetter sends them to a professional tanner who chemically treats them and then returns them with one side fur, the other leather.

"After we get the tanned skin back, the hunter brings us a picture of how

the animal looked, or how he wants it to be mounted. Then we build an individual laminated, paper-like form and stretch the skin over it," Gumbetter explained. "I fit them with painted glass eyes. For elephants, the tusks are removed and we make duplicates out of plastic that are one-tenth the weight. They also have detachable ears, plastic teeth and rubber tongues."

"WHEN IT'S FINISHED, it (the animal) no longer has any bacteria-infested material. It's something people can love and cherish 50 years from now."

Some hunters, especially weekend deer hunters, don't skin their animals. They leave the job to Gumbetter.

"I do all the cleaning myself. The animal's anatomy is discarded and used for soap," he said.

Mrs. Gumbetter usually sews up the holes left from novice animal skinners, before the skins are stretched.

Stuffing fish is a tedious task, Gumbetter admits, not because of the actual stuffing but because painting them is quite time consuming.

"Fish lose all their color when they're stuffed. So we have to repaint all the scales from looking at pictures," he added.

Stuffing an African lion takes about a week and costs about \$2,000, the taxidermist said, while a fish takes longer and the cost varies according to size.

INTERESTING VARIATIONS to stuffed animal heads or bodies are stuffed elephant and zebra feet.

"People use the elephant feet for footstools and the zebra feet for the bases of lamps. They're really beautiful," he said.

Gumbetter will stuff just about anything a person gives him, but he follows one cardinal rule. "I won't mount pets. I did a few and people were always unhappy because they said I got the expression wrong on the pet's face."



Here, one of Gumbetter's employees works with large pins to "back the fins" of a fish to hold it in place. Stuffing fish is a time consuming task because they lose their color during the taxidermy processes and must be repainted.



Jack Gumbetter's store is filled with stuffed animals just waiting for their owners to pick them up. But the two squirrels (foreground) dancing together, with their fingers joined are part of Gumbetter's personal collection.

'When it's finished, it (the animal) no longer has any bacteria-infested material. It's something people can love and cherish 50 years from now.'

— Jack Gumbetter
taxidermist



Taxidermist Jack Gumbetter demonstrates how he stretched the tanned lion's skin over a laminated paper mold. This lion is sitting down, which is unusual, he says, since most are standing or leaping over logs.

INSIDE ANGLES

LOOKING FOR SOMETHING to do today? The Farmington Hills Baptist Church, 28301 Middlebelt, is conducting a blood drive for the Red Cross today from 3-9 p.m. Blood can be donated by anyone between the ages of 17 through 65 in good general health. Giving blood takes less than an hour's time from registration to post-donation snack of juice and cookies. The actual donation takes less than 10 minutes. Blood can be donated every two months. For an appointment, call 851-0310 or 851-0311. Happy giving.

TODAY IS OPENING DAY for summer recreation fun at 10 school sites. Sessions run from 9:11-30 a.m. and 12:30-3 p.m. Monday through Thursday through July 30. Activities include arts and crafts, swimming, sports, games, a Bob-Lo trip, Kid's day, Junior Olympics, special events and wave-pool trips for kids 6 to 13.

Register at your nearest play center: Dunckel Middle School, Flanders, Forest, Gill, William Grace, Larkshire, Longacre, Middlebelt, Wood Creek and Wooddale elementary schools. For more information, call the Farmington Hills Recreation Department at 474-6115.

JUST A MONTH away is the Farmington Founders Festival, the 17th annual wedding. The festival committee is still looking for volunteers and entertainers for three showmobiles. There also will be a talent contest. All baton twirlers, gymnasts, singers, dancers, mimes, musicians and other entertainers are welcome. For more information, call 475-2819 or write P.O. Box 2694, Farmington Hills 48018 — attention showmobile.

THE SECOND EDITION of the Farmington Community Center's resale shop, is still offering spring and summer clothing for the whole family. Summer hours through July 31 are Tuesday and Thursday 10 a.m. to noon and Aug. 1 through Sept. 5, Saturday only from 9 a.m. to noon. The center is located at 24705 Farmington Road. Call 477-8404 for information.

HOT LEGS and kielbasa sounds like a weird combination, but the city of Hamtramck hopes it will spell success on July 4. That's when the city will introduce its first annual Kielbasa Festival at Hamtramck's Keyworth Stadium, on Roosevelt at Gallagher, two blocks east of J.W. Campau. Concurrent with the festival, which will feature (of course) a kielbasa-eating contest, will be an all-male Hot Leg contest. Ladies will judge the winners. The festival will run from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. and will end

with fireworks. All proceeds will go toward the refurbishing of the city's park and recreation areas and other community beautification projects. For more information, call the Hamtramck Chamber of Commerce at 875-7877.

IF HAWAII is on your docket of summer fun, here's a few little tidbits you may find interesting. The islands, in order of size from largest to smallest, are Hawaii, Maui, Oahu, Kauai, Molokai, Lanai and Niihau. Oahu has 85 percent of the population of the Hawaiian Islands, followed by Maui, the fastest growing of the islands. Molokai is the only island with a declining population, but it has the largest population of native Hawaiians. Lanai is owned by the Dole Pineapple Corp., and island inhabitants consist of plantation workers. Niihau is privately owned by the Sinclair family. Only Hawaiians are allowed on the island, and Hawaiian is the official language. Kahoolawe is owned by the U.S. Navy. The uninhabited tract of land is used as a bombing range.

LIBRARIES ARE LOOKING for creatives. The Michigan Library Association is sponsoring a contest for a logo that would appear in public, school, academic and special libraries to identify library services to persons from all walks of life. The design would capture the spirit of libraries, include a figure or motif which would become identifiable with Michigan libraries, be clean and clear, original and copyright free.

The contest is open to all, amateur and professional. Participants must be a Michigan resident, entries must be submitted in black ink on white paper, 6 1/4 by 11 inches. Entries should include name, address, and telephone number of participant on the back, lower-left corner. All entries must be postmarked no later than July 15.

Entries should be sent to: Michigan Library Association, Sally Arrives, chairperson, P.R. Council, Logo Contest, Riverview Public Library, Riverview 48162. First prize is \$50; second is \$30, and third prize is \$20.

OKAY, GARDENERS, here's your chance to show off those extra plump tomatoes, those giant cucumbers and squash. The Farmington Community Center plans to sponsor a summer farmer's market in August and September. Renters can reserve a spot at the market by picking up a contract at the community center or call 477-8404 for information about rates. Farmers and back-yard gardeners alike are invited. The market will be every Saturday from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., rain or shine.



Look of Opulence

Presenting Al Hambra, the newest in Camo's Katja collection. A royal marriage of the classic and contemporary, Al Hambra brings a wonderfully refreshing lift to your bedroom. The polyester/cotton comforter has Kodofil® polyester fiberfill so machine washing/drying is the thing. Add the charming bed skirt, sham and draperies for a complete coordinated look. Sampled in Hudson's Bedspreads, all stores except Ann Arbor, Grand Rapids, Saginaw, Lansing and Kalamazoo. Please allow 10 days for delivery. Comforter: twin, \$75; full, \$100; queen, \$125; dual, \$150. Bed skirt: twin, \$40; full, \$50; queen, \$65; dual, \$75. Sham: \$35. Lined drapery: 48x84", \$60.

*Special order only.

HUDSON'S