

A better idea

Hobby launches basement business venture

By MARIE MCGEE

Al Magewick admittedly is thankful for all the pain he endured when he and his wife Elaine first took up stained glass as a hobby.

If it wasn't for the elbow tendonitis, sore wrist and cramped fingers, he probably wouldn't have taken the time to design a tool that does away with all that suffering.

The result is that nonengineer Magewick, a retired Ford Motor Co. systems analyst, has come up with a hand tool that is rapidly being hailed as one of the best inventions to hit the glass-cutting field in the past 100 years. What surprises Al and Elaine Magewick the most "is why someone didn't do what we did long ago."

AFTER RECEIVING a patent on the hand tool, the couple have now formed their own manufacturing company, Pro

Glass Cutter Co., and are operating from the basement of their home with the help of two of their seven sons.

The tool, featuring what Magewick calls "comfort grip," was formally introduced to glass-cutting hobby enthusiasts at a national convention in Kansas City last July.

"The response was overwhelming," said Elaine Magewick, who has gone back to being a homemaker after a stint at selling real estate. Now, she also spends a lot of time helping her husband by handling the books and doing various other paper work involved in operating a business.

It all began two years ago. Seeking a hobby for the then approaching retirement years, the couple got into stained glass because they loved the beauty of the craft, and it was something they could do together. They began by taking a class from the Livonia School District night adult education program,

followed by classes from Ray Darwin, an Arbor artist.

EVERYTHING SEEMED to go along all right. The couple was enjoying the craft, creating several windows for their home in Francavilla Village subdivision in the Six Mile-Farmington roads area.

Except for the pain. "My elbow began to bother me. Then it was my wrist and my fingers. It got to the point where I was about to say, 'Forget it. It's not worth the pain,'" Magewick recalls.

"But I noticed that a lot of people seemed to be bothered with the same symptoms. Old-timers would go around constantly rubbing their elbows. For a while, I thought it was kind of secret password. That's when I began to think seriously about doing something to change the way glass was cut."

By that time, Magewick was convinced that the improvement was in the way the tool was gripped.

"AN EVEN AMOUNT of down pressure must be maintained to acquire an effective score. This is when the aching fingers, wrist and elbow develops," Magewick said.

Further aggravation occurs, Magewick discovered, in the awkward grip necessary to hold the conventional cutter in place while keeping it perpendicular to the glass.

For the beginner, the task of controlling the glass cutter with comfort, while simultaneously achieving an accurate score, is too demanding, Magewick felt. He could see why many beginners drop out of classes after two or three meetings.

This sentiment was echoed in the book, "Stained Glass" when author Jo Froblester-Mueller wrote: "The right tools will enforce good procedural practices and lead to success, while inadequate tools can cause a beginner to give up in frustration."

THE MAGEWICKS knew the feeling, and it spurred the research that eventually led to Magewick's improvement of the conventional tool — which has remained basically unchanged in the past century.

"One day at home at home I taped a conventional glass cutter to my index finger. I realized that the glass cutter was perpendicular to an imaginary cutting line, but this did not solve the problem of applying down pressure."

"I then realized that a circle configuration had to be part of the handle, so as to permit the index finger to become part of the same axis as the glass cutter. This would also provide the means of applying down pressure automatically."

Magewick recalls that he then reworked a conventional glass cutter by cutting one in two pieces. These pieces were welded to a brass ring, one inch in diameter.

"AS I SLIPPED the reworked glass cutter on my index finger, I knew that I was holding the imaginary glass cutter that I'd envisioned."

All Magewick needed now was evidence that his invention really worked. Ironically, it was Elaine who supplied that.

She had just started work on a terrarium project for a stained glass class she was enrolled in and — unbeknownst to her husband — decided to try Al's cutter instead of the usual model. She had particular trouble with the conventional glass cutter due to a broken finger years ago that had never healed properly. It made it impossible for her grip the cutter for long periods of time.

"I wanted to cut out a few stained glass pieces for my terrarium so I could get a head start on the class. Instead of a few pieces, I was able to cut out the entire bottom part of the terrarium. My hand didn't hurt, and I was able to work a longer period of time."

UNAWARE THAT she had used his cutter, Al thought she had purchased the bottom of the terrarium "because I knew she wouldn't have been able to cut that many pieces in so short a period of time with the old cutter."

At the time, Magewick was carpooling to his job in the Ford Motor design studio. He would often discuss his ideas with co-worker Herbert Gaschler, a former pattern maker who is now a designer in modeling systems at Ford's design center.

"Herb would give some advice from time to time and — out of friendship — wound up hand-making the original pattern," Magewick said.

THE MAGEWICKS have the tool cast in Pennsylvania but do the painting and packaging in their basement. The tools are painted a bright industrial orange for high visibility.

"Henry Ford and Amway started in their basements. I'm a great believer in free enterprise. We're going to give it whirl in ours," he smiled.



Phil Magewick, 20, helps out in the newly formed family business by dip-painting the glass-cutting tool a bright orange in line with new industrial safety guidelines. Phil is student at Henry Ford Community College.

Staff photos by Bill Bresler



Elaine Magewick shows off the Pro Glass Cutter tool invented by her husband, Al. It features a comfort grip.

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