

'A real community effort': Ottawa woodturners make 177 wig stands for cancer patients

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Published on: April 18, 2018 | Last Updated: April 18, 2018 12:02 PM EDT



Samuel Lewinshtein headed a project out of the Ottawa woodturning club where they made over 170 wig-stands to be donated to cancer patients. *ERROL MCGIHON / POSTMEDIA*

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Every time Julie Booker uses her wig stand, she's reminded of her mother, who battled cancer 40 years ago.

Booker, a cancer survivor herself, received her handcrafted wig stand while undergoing chemotherapy several years back. She still wears a wig today because a medical condition after chemo prevented her hair from growing back. When she uses her stand, she said she's reminded of how cancer took her own mother's life.

"Nearly 40 years ago, imagine the terrible wigs. She had nothing to stand it on. No care for the product," she said. "And here I am with a beautiful stand given to me. How lucky I am."

Booker, who volunteers at the Canadian Cancer Society in Ottawa, said she is more than ready to receive more than 170 handcrafted stands donated by the Ottawa Valley Woodturners for the society's wig salon on Tuesday. She said the salon has completely run out of them.

Members young and old from the woodturners club — a group that practises and teaches the art of woodturning — have handcrafted a large collection of wig stands for cancer patients.

Each stand has been individually designed to offer a personal touch for those going through a difficult stage in their lives.

"These are really beautiful pieces. They're very personalized," said project head Samuel Lewinshtein. "I asked the makers to sign their names on the stands."

Lewinshtein said the club's aim was to make 150 stands as part of the Canada 150 celebrations last year, although the project continued into 2018 due to personal commitments. Even so, they surpassed their goal with 177 stands made.

Lewinshtein, who’s been woodturning for nearly 20 years, said the project was fuelled by his desire to help those in need after having donated so much of his work to CHEO the last decade.

“When the verdict comes in that you have cancer, that changes your whole life,” he said. “If I can give them something positive when they’re going through treatment, then I will.”

Lewinshtein said the club’s support for the project was overwhelming, and that he “didn’t have to twist any arms for people to volunteer their time.” Nearly 70 members, both experienced and novice, joined the cause.

“It was a real community effort,” he said.

Each stand is about 15 inches high, although some members incorporated up to 20 pieces of high-quality wood in their designs.

Shirley Stapley, a club member for eight years, was so excited about the project that she and her husband spent eight hours a day for a week making 10 stands, and plan to make even more.

“I know how hard it is when you lose your hair,” she explained. “I’ve unfortunately lost my hair twice due to other medical issues, and would have loved something that was handmade for me at the time.”

The pair made their stands out of maple burl – an expensive wood donated to them by an Ottawa hardwood store. She said that one of her stands has already been donated to a patient who was “just in tears ... she was so happy.”

Julie Booker said handcrafted stands are always very poignant, and she’s grateful for the woodturners club’s efforts.

“I know every single person (in the salon) will appreciate them. The stands will be loved and valued.”

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