

The time of his life

Clock fixer's pastime keeps pendulums swinging

By Louise Rachlis

In this decade of checking the time on cellphone or computer, the chime of the grandfather clock hearkens back to another era: an era that Ottawa clock repair devotee Georges Royer is helping keep alive.

The first clock Royer ever received was a 150-year-old French clock, a gift of appreciation for assistance he gave a resident of his 200-inhabitant village in Champagne, in the east of France.

He brought the clock to Canada when he emigrated, and it became the first he fixed.

The holder of a PhD in French literature from the University of Ottawa, he taught part-time at the university and did translation for the federal government, while buying more clocks at auctions, and learning clock repair along the way.

"Clock repair was just something I liked to do," he says. "The interesting part for me was that I had the ability to figure out a problem in a clock and do the repair. I found I had a mechanical mind. This is very important and helped me very much. Some people are interested in clock repair, but just don't have the mechanical mind."

When he was 60, one of his neighbours brought him a clock he'd bought at auction that wasn't working. Royer got it going, and "that was the beginning of my career."

He joined the Ottawa Valley Watch and Clock Collectors Club, a group of about 60 people interested in clocks and watches — but few who repair them — and took some courses. He's friends with Allan Symons, founder of the Canadian Clock Museum in Deep River, who is also a member of the group.

Royer and his wife Patsy have



Photos: Louise Rachlis

Georges Royer shows off some of the 250 clocks in his house, including those under repair in his workshop (inset).

two children and a grandchild, all in Vancouver. When the children were growing up, the family used to live in the country outside Ottawa where they hobby farmed, and Royer did translation from home. When the kids were teenagers, they bought an Echo Drive property and re-built on it.

Ten years ago he hung out a sign for Rideau Clock Repair at the Riverdale side of his home on Echo Drive, which overlooks the Rideau Canal across from Lansdowne Park. Now at 72, he's retired, and clock repair is his full-time occupation. He repairs antique timepieces such as mantle clocks, wall clocks, grandfather clocks, and clocks with pendulums, but no watches. "Watches are too small, too tricky, and need special tools."

He gets many inquiries over the Internet and through his website, and when asked, he has also done barometers, music boxes and an old gramophone.

"I love the work because I've always been fascinated by the clock mechanism. It's a wonderful little mechanism — when I see a clock that doesn't work, it annoys me."

Throughout the house, Royer has his own collection of over 250

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— Georges Royer

clocks, 18 of them from Arthur Pequegnat, of Berlin, Ont., (now Kitchener), one of the few Canadian clock makers.

There's an 1830 Twiss grandfather clock with a wooden mechanism.

In the workshop, there are drawers full of old movements so he can take a wheel from one, a movement from another.

He's proud to be able to complete 99 per cent of the repairs he attempts. "German, French, Japanese, I can repair any clock," he says. "No matter the damage or the dirt, they can be fixed unless I can't get the correct part."

Many of his clients come to him with a clock they've inherited; a clock their parents received on their wedding day or a clock they used to see in the home of an uncle who passed away. "There's a lot of sentimental attachment."

He gets the odd battery clock — and he tells people it needs a

new battery or the battery is upside down — but his forte is mechanical clocks, especially grandfather clocks.

Many grandfather clocks have come over from England and Scotland in the 19th century and need repair. He has looked after quite a few, including an 1830 clock at the British High Commission, one for the U.S. ambassador, and for General Walter Natynczyk in his office.

He usually tells clients the job will take two weeks, letting the clock run for at least a week to make sure it's in good working order. And when it goes back where it came from, he doesn't see the clock again for a long time.

He also makes house calls. "It's very important to me to do a good job."

"Many clocks are not being fixed because people don't want to spend more than they're worth to get them fixed. I don't have the overhead, and I can charge much less."

Royer says he's happy that "money is not the essential part." "I get the satisfaction of knowing the clock will be running for many years. I keep busy, and that keeps

That's a wrap

After 66 issues, over 500 articles and hundreds of thousands of words, this is the final issue of *the Wrap*.

For the past 15 months this special zoned product has told so many of your personal stories, both fiction and non-fiction. It has been unique in that so much of the material has come from you.

When people ask me what I do at the *Citizen* I tell them I write, edit, design and — best of all — I make people happy, because of the opportunity to publish readers' articles in the *Wrap*.

While I will be continuing my regular work in the *Citizen's* Advertising department, I will miss hearing about all the energy in the non-profit and charitable sectors, the interesting activities in the community, and your memoirs of life in Ottawa and elsewhere.

Thank you for your memorable contributions.

Chris Macknie
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my wife happy. Having an activity during retirement is so important, and I meet very nice people."

He repairs up to 300 clocks a year, a constant flow. "I never stay a whole week without getting a phone call, and many contact me through the website, www.rideauclockrepair.com."

One man wrote to him from Mexico about a grandfather clock he bought there. The man brought the mechanism to Ottawa, where he had a cottage, and then took it back to Mexico once it had been repaired.

A student comes to his workshop once or twice a week and Georges passes on what he's learned.

While all the clocks under repair strike the hour, those throughout the house are mainly silent. It takes too long to wind them all up, or change them to standard or daylight-saving time.

And despite the hundreds of clocks throughout the house, there is no clock in the bedroom. "My wife doesn't like it," he laughs.

OCSC makes a difference in the lives of clients, volunteers

By Martine Riendeau

With over 3,000 volunteers within the 19 Ottawa Community Support Coalition member agencies, seniors and adults with physical disabilities are able to live independently within the comfort of their own home. The Good Companions and the King's Daughters Dinner Wagon are two great organizations which are part of the OCSC. These organizations offer other vital community supports such as friendly visitors, daily calls for reassurance and links to screened, reliable help at home.

Ceceline Smith is an 81-year-old Jamaican-Canadian woman who has been a transportation client of the Good Companions — Community Support Services for the past 10 years. The Transportation Program provides drives to medical and other essential appointments for registered clients who are unable to use public transportation or Para Transpo.



Ceceline Smith, left, uses the Transportation Program of the Good Companions, one of 19 member agencies of the Ottawa Community Support Coalition.

A major benefit of this program — in addition to getting frail people to and from important and timely medical appointments they might otherwise miss — is that the drivers also provide a steady arm from door to door, as well as emotional support and reassurance along the way.

There is a huge assumption out there that seniors have family to rely on for such support. This is often not the case, says Judy Bedell, director of Community Support Services at the Good Companions. "Social support tends to shrink with late age and/or disability," said Bedell. "Consider the

number of people you know who are single, who don't have children or whose familial relationship is damaged or distant. Who will help them in their later years? And then there are those whose one caregiver is burning out or is already burnt out."

Smith, who lives with multiple health challenges, describes how additional help such as the Transportation Program is very important to her. "The driver sits with me until the doctor sees me, then makes sure I am home safely," said Smith. "I love the Good Companions and I treat them with respect and they treat me with respect. They couldn't have given the place a better name than the Good Companions."

The cost to use the Transportation Program is very affordable at \$12 for a round trip, which helps to cover the volunteer drivers' expenses. Clients are also responsible for any parking fees. Without this program to rely on, Smith's health and her ability to remain at home would be further challenged.

Community Support Services play a major role in making a meaningful difference in the lives of both clients and volunteers. Margaret Baxter is a volunteer driver for the Good Companions' Transportation Program and for the King's Daughters Dinner Wagon, commonly known as Meals on Wheels. The King's Daughters Dinner Wagon, a not-for-profit agency, has been dedicated to providing nutritious meals, daily companionship and comfort with a smile. Baxter, a friendly and energetic 82-year-old, has been delivering meals for Meals on Wheels for over 40 years.

"I started getting involved around 1967 in Montreal when they started the first program," said Baxter. When I moved to Ottawa in 1979, I almost immediately got in touch with Meals on Wheels. I have volunteered as an office assistant, delivery person, driver, as well as a member on the Board of Directors."

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