

# Home + GARDEN



EDUARDO CONTRERAS UT

Bettyann Bird uses tools in the workshop of the San Diego Fine Woodworkers Association, where women now account for 22 percent of the membership.

**G**enial banter and easy camaraderie permeated the room as several dozen members of the San Diego Fine Woodworkers Association temporarily broke away from their projects at the members' workshop, located in Sorrento Valley. It was early November, and members had gathered in a central room to discuss their current efforts, all to be offered to the public later in the month at the group's annual holiday gift sale.

In the past, these member gatherings were predominantly "old White men," as several members put it: Only 3 percent of the woodworking shop's membership was female when it opened in June 2017.

But things have changed, according to shop director Dallas Keck, 71, of Escondido, who has been a woodworker for 55 years. Women now form 22 percent of the membership, and that percentage is growing — with about a third of all new applicants women, he said.

On this Friday morning, more than a third of the members reporting on their holiday build projects were women. Participants enthusiastically presented their latest creations, with members trading advice to resolve any problems they'd encountered and sharing tips on how best to finish their pieces.

Their beautifully crafted work



TOM YORK

Oi Ling Kwan of Rancho Bernardo was nervous about using power tools when she took the first introductory woodworking class in 2017. She's now a "super volunteer" who is a senior teaching assistant and a shift supervisor at the shop.

## Building a BASE

Women find camaraderie, community and leadership opportunities with other hobbyists in a woodworkers association formerly dominated by men

BY NICOLE SOURS LARSON

included cutting and game boards, turned bowls, trays and lidded boxes of all sizes, wine bottle and wine glass racks, holiday and home decor, jewelry and pens, as well as furniture, sculpture and wall art, their craftsmanship limited only by their creativity. For 2022, members created and donated about 1,500 items for the sale, most made at the members' shop during weekly build sessions for the holiday gifts.

Woodworking as a hobby has traditionally drawn primarily men. Observers say that's in large part because, in the past, boys were offered shop classes in school while girls were channeled into home economics classes, steering them away from "dangerous" power shop tools. Yet as shop classes disappeared in schools and new opportunities opened up for girls and women, many became more interested in trying their hand at woodworking.

Many of the women involved with the San Diego Fine Woodworkers Association have been woodworking for 15 to 20 years or longer and have their own home equipment setups; others' experience ranges from a few months to five or six years. Many are retired from medical, professional or technical careers or have flexible work schedules, and most have a history of working with their hands, whether sewing, knitting, crocheting or cooking, often using sharp tools and power equipment.

The word "community" figured prominently in their description of what drew them into the woodworking world and why they stay. They spoke of the welcoming warmth and camaraderie they experienced in joining the organization's shop.

Sharon Sykora of Rancho Bernardo is a retired nurse practitioner and nursing instructor at Grossmont College who now serves as director of shop operations. Sykora,

SEE BUILDING • E4

### THE SUSTAINABLE ROSE GARDEN

## ROSES GET THEIR 'AAAHHH' TREATMENT

Annual pruning enhances rose's health, maximizes the number, size and beauty of future blooms

BY RITA PERWICH

The words "reinvigorate, rejuvenate and refresh" sum up the blissful response we experience during and after a spa treatment or vacation. The words grab our attention even further when they are followed by the directive, "Repeat at the start of each year." Who doesn't love a fresh and healthful regimen to launch each new year? I'm in!

When a rose is pruned at the start of each year, it receives a reinvigorating, rejuvenating, refreshing, individualized "aaahhh" treatment. Pruning is



RITA PERWICH

Shrub rose, 'Lady of the Dawn,' before and after her annual pruning. Stripping out leaves removes lingering fungi and pests.

one of the greatest gifts we give our roses. It contributes to the health of the rose, and it maximizes the number, size and beauty of the blooms in the upcoming growing season. So, pruning our roses is a gift to ourselves.

There are two main reasons we prune roses: rejuvenation and ventilation.

### Rejuvenation

**Bottoms first:** Start by looking at the bud union (the base of the grafted rose). Assess and keep the strongest, healthiest and youngest (usually green) canes. As roses age, canes usually become grayer, rougher and less productive. If there are a sufficient number of new

SEE ROSES • E2

## LOCAL CLASSES CAN HELP YOU LEVEL UP SKILL SETS IN 2023

Explore a hobby or even start path to a new career

BY CARLOS RICO

Have you been thinking about starting a side hustle or new career in 2023?

Do you have a New Year's resolution of leveling up your skill set? If this is the case, there are a variety of options to try across San Diego County.

We put together a guide of career fields — automotive technology, construction, culinary arts, digital arts and business — with associate degrees or career advancement certifications available at local colleges, universities, libraries and trade organizations.

### Automotive technology

Having the skills to repair your vehicle or fix someone else's can be an asset. It can also make you extra cash and become a new

career path. There are a handful of local community colleges that offer hands-on classes, certificates and degrees to become an automotive technician in various specialty areas.

• **The San Diego College of Continuing Education** offers four certification programs to be an auto body and paint technician, auto technician, quick service inspection technician or service adviser. The four programs range from 13 weeks to 39 weeks and are free to attend. [sdcce.edu/automotive](http://sdcce.edu/automotive)

• **San Diego Miramar College** has an automotive technology program where you can get an Associate of Science in automotive technology; an advanced emission specialist certificate of performance; or a certificate of achievement in automotive

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EDUARDO CONTRERAS U-T PHOTOS

Members of the San Diego Fine Woodworkers Association gather at the workshop in Sorrento Valley, where they often trade advice and tips on their projects.

## BUILDING

FROM E1  
71, has enjoyed wood-working for about 21 years and joined the association before the shop opened. Now she's usually there twice a week.

"I used to do a lot of sewing, working with two-dimensional patterns, which is similar to wood-working. People who use sewing machines are often also comfortable on the bandsaw," she said.

"I always said my next hobby would be wood-working. Then a friend told me of someone selling their woodworking tools," Sykora said. She set up a home shop.

Like many members, including most of the women interviewed for this story, she took classes at Palomar College, which she describes as "the gold standard" for woodworking education.

Former shop director Gary Anderson, 72, of La Mesa recalls asking Sykora after the shop opened how they could attract more women. Through word of mouth, Sykora and other female members encouraged friends and acquaintances interested in wood-working to join the shop. Many have now advanced into the shop leadership, serving as committee leaders, shift supervisors and teaching assistants.

Among those who learned about the woodworkers association shop from Sykora was Oi Ling Kwan, a fellow Rancho Bernardo resident who retired from UCSD Medical Center as a cardiology department manager and technical director. She, too, has long enjoyed doing handcrafts, particularly knitting and crocheting.

"I was looking to expand my horizons," said Kwan, 72. "I always loved wood — such a lovely feel when you touch it. I was in a yoga class with Sharon. I learned that SDFWA had an introductory class," she said.

The Hong Kong native was in the first introductory woodworking class in 2017, which was taught by Anderson, a woodworker



Members of the group make anything from furniture, cutting boards and trays to boxes, jewelry and home decor.

for 65 years who now serves as committee chairman. He smiled as he recounted her progress toward prowess.

"Initially, Oi Ling was scared to death of power tools. We taught her how to operate the tools — safety is paramount — she made her first cut. She was very apprehensive, but it came out perfect," Anderson said. "She beamed."

Kwan recalled how that moment bolstered her confidence.

"Gary said relax and go with the flow on the bandsaw. I got hooked, and that was it," she said.

Later, Kwan took classes at Palomar and is now a senior teaching assistant for the introductory classes, a shift supervisor and a leader of the weekly holiday build sessions, coming into the shop three or four times a week. She's been dubbed a "super volunteer" for all her contributions to the shop's activities.

Kwan particularly enjoys making small decorative items, especially boxes and Shaker-inspired items. She commented on "the wonderful sense of community."

That's a sentiment echoed by Sykora.

"I can't emphasize enough how supportive the people at the shop have been. Women are fearful of their reception, of how they'll be treated. They find instead that they're welcomed," Sykora said.

"(Newcomers) ask whom they should work with. We steer them to someone who's friendly, with the right skill set similar to their interests."

Rita Hanscom, 68, a now-retired deputy attorney general from Hillcrest, discovered the craft about seven years ago from a colleague who took classes at Palomar.

"I realized I could do a lot of my own repairs. Now I make furniture," Hanscom said. "From YouTube, I figured out how to do things before I looked into SDFWA. Then I met Sharon (Sykora) and Marty Jacobson and asked them, 'Where are the women?' I joined the shop mostly for the community," she explained.

Jacobson, a woodworker for about 25 years, recently completed a ukulele that she made "mostly in class at Palomar." She finished it with the luthiers, a shop special interest group that focuses on making stringed instruments.

"Now I'm learning to play it," she said.

Jacobson, in turn, recruited her La Jolla neighbor Darcy Siegel, a mechanical engineer and woodworker, after she noticed Siegel's home shop.

"I like to build things, especially furniture," explained Siegel, 64, who has done woodworking for about six years.

Mary Russo of La Mesa is a retired clinical labora-

tory scientist who has done woodworking for 15 years. Russo, 70, is now a shift supervisor and furniture builder who enjoys turning bowls and making inlaid tables and Shaker trays. She, too, took classes at Palomar.

Kirsten Clark of Point Loma left her media job during the pandemic. She took up woodworking when she decided to make something to sleep on in her backyard. She designed a sofa from a YouTube class before taking the introductory class at the shop, followed by classes at Palomar. Although Clark, 51, has been woodworking only a year and a half, she said she's learning as much as she can and hopes to eventually develop a business.

Women have formed an informal but supportive network within the wood-working circles, Sykora explained, but most have integrated within the larger community and the shop's special interest groups, which focus on specific skills.

"Women woodworkers are not a rarity anymore. We are not an endangered species. For any woman who thinks she'd like to do woodworking but is intimidated, don't be," Sykora said. "There's so much help out there. You won't be thrown to the wolves. Take a chance."

Sours Larson is a San Diego freelance writer.

## About the San Diego Fine Woodworkers Association and its members' shop

After seeing beautiful handcrafted furniture displayed in San Francisco in 1981, Lynn Rybarczyk recognized that San Diego woodworkers had nowhere to show their work. Rybarczyk, still active in the organization, was inspired to join with other volunteers to organize both San Diego Fine Woodworkers Association and the forerunner of the Design in Wood Exhibition at the San Diego County Fair, then called the Southern California Expo Fine Woodworking Exhibit, to provide collaboration and exhibition opportunities for San Diego woodworkers.

SDFWA, now the largest woodworking guild in the U.S., blossomed as a non-profit, organizing the annual exhibition at the county fair and community service programs while also providing a wide range of educational programs, tours and a newsletter for its members. The association peaked at 1,690 members in 1999 and is now about 1,100 members.

"Ten years ago, we realized membership was declining. Shop classes in public schools had disappeared," said Gary Anderson, 72, of La Mesa, the shop co-founder and former shop director. "We got the idea of starting classes, but we needed a facility where we could hold classes," Anderson explained. "We also wanted to give people without their own home shops a place to work."

Anderson and other volunteers spent three years developing a business plan, raising \$100,000 in seed money and finding a suitable location. Many members donated high-quality tools and power equipment to the nonprofit for the shop. Talented volunteers did most of the shop build-out, adding custom cabinetry, shelving and furnishings and fittings of their own design and construction.

Finally, after completing their operating plans, they opened their dream shop in June 2017, with 3,000 square feet and 125 members signing up for shop privileges, and classes starting soon afterward.

The shop has proved so popular, they have expanded it twice since opening and will provide 5,000 square feet of work space once the current expansion is complete, enabling their shop membership of 375 to grow.

Many members with home shops, including Anderson and shop director Dallas Keck, prefer working at the association's shop because of its sense of community.

"We work together, we learn and get inspired by each other. It's a very special place," Keck explained. "It's the glue that holds it together. We guide (new) people to others who can fill a void."

Director of membership Nancy Bosecker, 47, concurs. "The shop has reinvigorated the organization and the whole woodworking community," said Bosecker, a software engineer from Mira Mesa who discovered woodworking through the county fair exhibition. She

says she enjoys building a variety of items, ranging from cutting boards and frames to a bathroom vanity.

### Curious about joining the woodworking community?

Perhaps you've oohed and aahed over the exquisite displays at the Design in Wood Exhibition and wondered how you, too, can learn basic woodworking or improve your skills.

Your best bet is to attend a meeting of the San Diego Fine Woodworkers Association, whose stated goals are "to educate, promote and build appreciation for the principles and practices of fine woodworking." Members usually meet at 7 p.m. the last Wednesday of odd-numbered months, plus April, at Our Mother of Confidence Catholic Church, 3131 Governor Drive in University City. Each meeting features a speaker discussing an aspect of woodworking and is free and open to the public. Membership is \$35 per year.

SDFWA offers introductory, more advanced and specialized classes at their woodworking shop, located off Interstate 805 at 5360 Eastgate Mall, Suite E in Sorrento Valley, near Miramar Road.

To enroll in a class, you must be an association member. Upcoming classes are listed on the website.

Additional membership in the woodworking shop is by application and interview only and is currently capped at 375 members, but that may increase when the current shop expansion is complete. There is a waitlist, but new members are invited to join each month. Shop membership requires a willingness to participate in the all-volunteer-run shop operations and the holiday gift build workshop. See the website for detailed requirements.

"For new members, we look at their hobbies, their skill level, their willingness to volunteer and whether they've taken classes. We try to get a mix of experienced (people) and amateurs. My personal goal is to bring in more women and minorities," explained Nancy Bosecker, director of membership.

The shop offers a wide range of professional-grade hand, power and digital woodworking equipment, all listed on the website. Every member must be checked out with a hands-on safety test for authorization to use each type of equipment.

Annual membership has two tiers. Silver membership is \$295 a year and includes 15 yearly three-hour shop "slots," appropriate for the occasional user with a home shop. Gold membership is \$550 and includes 50 annual slots, suitable for the frequent shop user.

For more details about SDFWA meetings, classes and membership, visit [sdfwa.org](http://sdfwa.org).

Professional-level woodworking classes leading to certificates and degrees are taught at Palomar College in San Marcos, [palomar.edu/woodworking](http://palomar.edu/woodworking).

NICOLE SOURS LARSON



Kirsten Clark, 51, of Point Loma has been woodworking for about a year and a half. She said she's learning as much as she can and hopes to develop a business with her new hobby.