

NEWS & VIEWS

By Sharon Hambrick



Pen turning with a mission

Over the past three years a unique pen turning program founded by Larry Beckwith at the Arborwood Assisted Living Center in Granger, Indiana, has spread to three states, and a new program is on the horizon in another state at the time of this writing (Sept. 15, 2008).

Beckwith and the Penwright program were profiled in the Oct/Nov 2006 issue of *Woodcraft Magazine*. That story, “From the Hands of Alzheimer’s,” and the accompanying pen tool making instructions are included here along with information about the people who accepted Beckwith’s challenge and started their own programs.

What makes the Penwright program unique, aside from the lack of power tools, is the effect it has not only on Alzheimer’s patients but also on other nursing home residents whose activities are restricted by their physical conditions. Beckwith and Arborwood life enrichment coordinator Patty Piechocki found early on that residents who turned pens reaped psychological, social, and health benefits. The activity gives residents something they can do—make pens for themselves or others—while keeping mentally and, to some degree, physically active. It also develops a sense of camaraderie as residents share the pen turning activity.

Contents

**Dannis Lozano gains national attention
for unique pen turning program**

click here

**Larry Beckwith and the Penwrights:
expanding their horizons**

click here

Following in Beckwith’s footsteps

click here

**“From the Hands of Alzheimer’s,”
pages 52-58, *Woodcraft Magazine* Issue 13 (Oct/Nov 2006)**

click here

Pen Tool Construction

click here

Lozano's award brings national attention to unique program

When Dannis Lozano accepted the Jefferson Award for community service at a June 2008 ceremony in Washington, D.C., he brought national attention to a program that introduces nursing home residents to wooden pen turning, minus power tools—a concept created by Larry Beckwith and featured in *Woodcraft Magazine* (Oct/Nov 06). Lozano's work with the program led to his selection for the award.



Dannis Lozano

Beckwith's goal in bringing pen turning to Alzheimer's patients in the South Bend, Indiana, area was to give them something they could accomplish. He hoped the magazine publicity would entice other woodworkers to begin their own programs.

In Dublin, Texas, Lozano read about Beckwith and accepted his challenge on a large scale. He contacted area nursing homes and made tools and workstations (eight for each home) so that interested residents could transform square blanks of wood into beautiful pens. Eventually he extended the program to include 14 facilities in several area towns where participants have turned more than 500 pens. Lozano charges only a small fee for the pen mechanisms and pays for materials by selling his turned salad bowls, candlestick holders, and platters. If requested, he also engraves pens free of charge using a new engraving machine he purchased.

On April 24, 2008, Lozano was one of 10 semifinalists who received the Jefferson Award at a ceremony in Abilene, Texas, for his work with the pen turning program. Ida Smith, activity director

for Homestead Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Gorman, Texas, nominated Lozano for the award, which is sponsored at the local level by the Abilene Reporter-News and KTXS-TV in conjunction with the Nonprofit Management Center at Abilene Christian University. In June 2008 Lozano traveled to Washington, D.C., where he and 75 other winners from across the country accepted the Jefferson Awards for Public Service given at the national level by the American Institute of Public Service.

Lozano's volunteer work began many years ago while in the U.S. Navy and later the U.S. Coast Guard. Now retired from his own plumbing business, Lozano continues to help senior citizens on fixed incomes by doing plumbing free of charge.

(A shorter version of this article appeared in the Oct/Nov 08 issue of *Woodcraft Magazine*.)

Dannis Lozano's Contact Information

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Residents at Homestead Nursing and Rehab in Gorman, Texas, use Dannis Lozano's workstations and tools to turn wooden pens.

Larry Beckwith and the Arborwood Penwrights: recognition and expansion

Since Larry Beckwith introduced pen turning to the Arborwood Assisted Living Center in Granger, Indiana, in January of 2005, both he and the program have earned recognition for their efforts. At the same time Larry and the Penwrights have worked to bring the program to others in the community.

Recognition

Beckwith is one of five people from throughout the United States selected by the Assisted Living Federation of America for the 2008 Volunteer Hero Award. Patty Piechocki, Arborwood life enrichment coordinator, nominated Beckwith for the award.

In her recommendation letter, Piechocki wrote about the program participants: "Staff members of Arborwood Living Center started to notice a change in behaviors of the residents—they were always out of their rooms. Friendships were forming in response to the group. Members reported that they were more happy, and optimistic. Residents' aimless wandering (which is common behavior displayed by those with Alzheimer's) decreased. Residents with significant memory loss were concentrating on their projects for longer periods of time. And, best of all, those with diagnosed depression were rarely displaying symptoms."

Beckwith's other awards include: the 2006 Martin H. Miller Senior Volunteer of the Year Award for the state of Indiana and the 2006 Senior Volunteer of the Year Award from Real Services of Northern Indiana.

The Penwrights were nominated for the 2007 Senior Volunteer Group of the Year Award from Real Services, and were also recognized in 2007 by the Alzheimer's Services of Northern Indiana for outstanding support. Piechocki was nominated

in 2008 for the Professional Care Giver of the Year Award from Real Services.

Program updates

- The Penwrights had crafted a total of 263 pens by May of 2008 and had sold many of their creations to support local charities, including the Alzheimer's Services of Northern Indiana.

- Not satisfied to stop within the Arborwood walls, in May 2008 the Penwrights joined with the Center for Hospice and Palliative Care of St. Joseph County to help meet the needs of hospice clients. A new program will allow the hospice clients to attend the Penwright program with their loved ones or hospice volunteers. In addition to the friendship and camaraderie offered by the pen making activity, the hospice clients will make "legacy pens" for their loved ones.

- The Penwrights formed a committee of health care professionals, community relations advisors, and financial supporters to work to strengthen the Penwright vision.

- The first Penwright manual is being developed to guide health care professionals interested in beginning their own programs.

- Tool redesign is on ongoing process.

- Penwright programs have been started in three other states (see separate articles).

Larry Beckwith's contact information

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Following in Larry Beckwith's footsteps

Three other programs also trace their roots to Larry Beckwith's Penwright program, and a third is in the organizational stage.

TEXAS

See separate story about Dannis Lozano's programs in the Dublin, Texas, area.

IDAHO

In Boise, Idaho, Alfred Howell introduced Beckwith's program at the Life Care Center of Boise in June 2007.

Howell reported that the program has met with a positive response at the center and as well as in the community. "Woodworker club members have offered wood for pen blanks, pen kits, volunteer support to make hand tools, and volunteers to aid residents on craft day," Howell said.

Alfred Howell's contact information

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WASHINGTON

In Kirkland, Washington, Ron Schroder started a program at Aegis Lodge, a retirement community, in April 2008. Participants range in age from 67 to 89. "They have a great deal of fun," Schroder said. Besides the social benefits, Schroder noted that the activity has been good therapy for the participants, helping strengthen their hands, forearms, and a little bit of their shoulders.

"I give the credit to Larry (Beckwith)," Schroder said, referring the success of the program.

Ron Schroder's contact information

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TENNESSEE

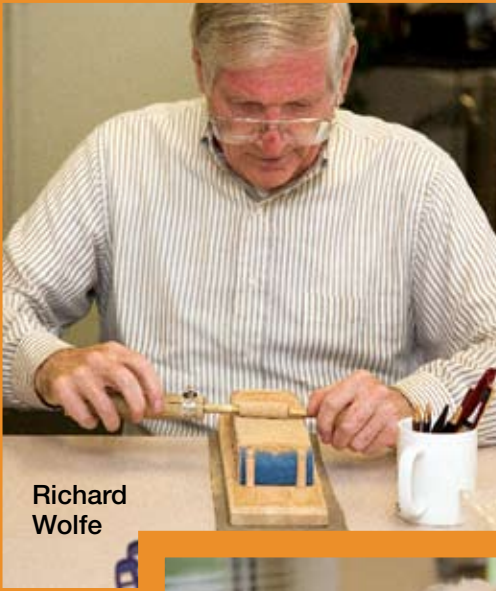
Butch Ruth is organizing a program for the Murfreesboro-Rutherford County area in Tennessee.

Butch Ruth's contact information:

Mail: 8824 Rocky Fork-Almaville Rd., Smyrna, TN 37167



Dorothy Campbell



Richard Wolfe



Elsie Kraft



Loren Shingledecker



Harry Mrozinski



Florence Bronstetter

FROM THE HANDS OF ALZHEIMER'S

BY SARAH BRADY

“The greatest pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do.”

— *Walter Bagehot, 19th-century British journalist*

It's Monday morning, and Harry Mrozinski hurries down the hallway of the Arborwood Assisted Living Center. He knocks on the closed door of another resident's room. “It's time to make pens,” he calls, then patiently waits for the door to swing open.

The man in the room, Richard, takes the handles of Harry's wheelchair. The symptoms of the middle stages of Alzheimer's disease sometimes cause Richard to forget that Mondays are special. Fortunately, Harry has arrived to accompany him to the recreation room. Their faces and voices are animated as they talk about the wood selection, sanding, cutting, and finishing in store for them this morning.

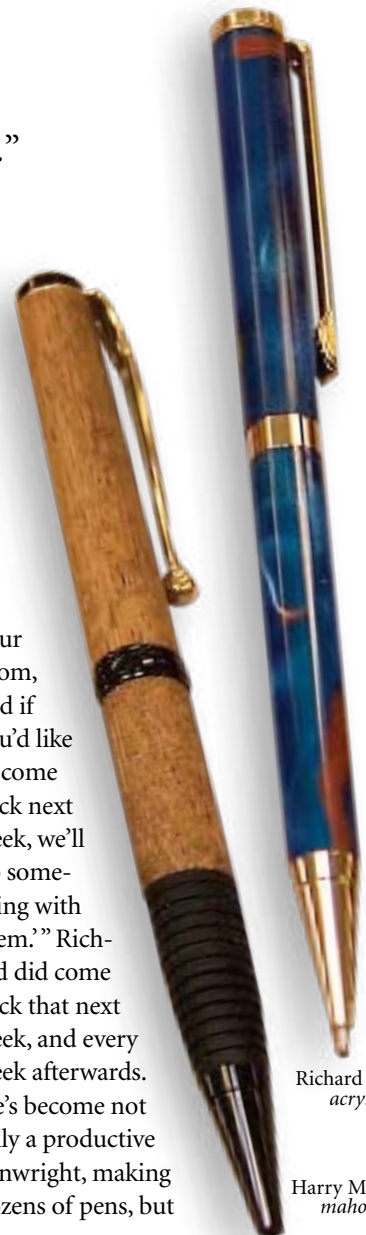
The cheerful man pushing Harry's wheelchair had arrived at Arborwood two years earlier, depressed and withdrawn. He'd refused to leave his room for several weeks. Previously a successful

patent attorney, Richard had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and the memory loss and confusion accompanying its initial stages had left him feeling hopeless and gloomy. But soon after Richard's arrival, volunteer Larry Beckwith introduced a program at Arborwood that would change Richard's life.

The Penwright program is based on Larry's system of turning pens without power tools of any kind. Using tools he invented, seniors with mild to moderate dementia can safely create beautiful pens with little or no assistance.

At first, Richard was a tough sell. He glowered in his room, and had to be coaxed out to join a session, where he sat with his arms crossed. “He sat there for two hours and didn't say anything. He just watched with a big frown on his face,” Larry recalls. “I reached into my bag of tricks and pulled out a pen kit and a wood blank. I said, ‘Take these to

your room, and if you'd like to come back next week, we'll do something with them.’” Richard did come back that next week, and every week afterwards. He's become not only a productive Penwright, making dozens of pens, but



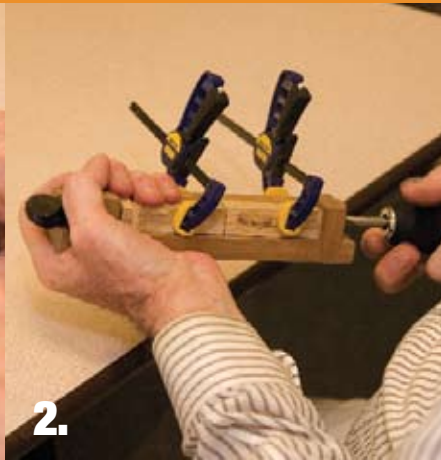
Richard Wolfe
acrylic

Harry Mrozinski
mahogany



1.

A MINI MITER BOX and fine-toothed saw are used to cut common pen blanks to size.



2.

A SIMPLE BUT EFFECTIVE CRADLE allows drilling of a centered hole. Miniature clamps help keep the blank stable.



3.

SANDED BRASS BUSHING are glued into the blanks with regular wood glue, which has plenty of strength for the task and is safe for residents.

also one of the most helpful, happy and outgoing of Arborwood's residents.

Patty Piechocki, Arborwood's life enrichment coordinator, says Richard's journey is a common one for victims of Alzheimer's and other diseases such as Parkinson's. "When you are diagnosed with dementia, you feel worthless. You have no independence, no sense of identification," she says. "Making the

they start thinking and talking about friends and family members they want to make pens for. Soon, they start selling their pens to raise money for Alzheimer's Services of Northern Indiana (Arborwood is in Granger). Last year, the Penwrights presented a check to the organization for \$720 on a local TV news show. "Here are people with Alzheimer's who are making pens and selling them to help combat the disease that is afflicting them," says Larry. "Maybe they're not a school principal, a corporate executive, or a nurse in a hospital. That's all in the past. Now they have something else. That's what it's all about, and I'm thrilled."

of woodworking in an assisted living center, he says he discovered tactics that even trump some typical power-



SQUARING THE ENDS and removing excess glue can be done without power or a pen mill, thanks to this hand-cranked disc sander Larry Beckwith devised. Pat Huyvaert holds a pen part steady in the cradle while sanding.

pens gives them an opportunity to do something that makes a difference. It gives them a new start."

Most of the Penwrights start out by making pens for themselves. Then

Pens without power tools?

Larry now visits Arborwood for a morning pen-making session every Monday. He is a retired school teacher, longtime nursing home volunteer, and the brains behind the power-tool-less turning method that, at first, sounds utterly impossible. While searching for a way to solve the obvious problems posed by the concept

Harry Mrozinski
penlight

Richard Wolfe
plastic-divider accents

Pat Huyvaert
rainbow wood

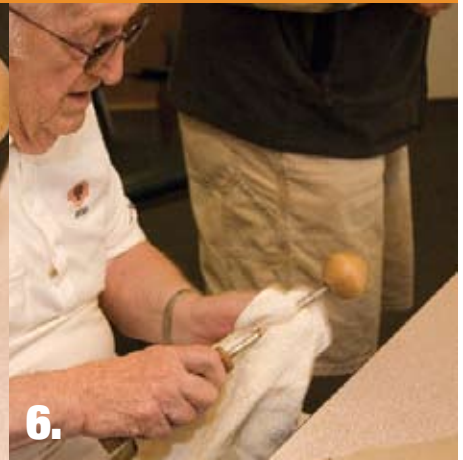




A SANDING BLOCK CRADLE on a non-slip pad facilitates vigorous sanding. Two sets of bushings are used to guide the process.



THE OUTER BUSHINGS are removed, and the Penwright moves to hand sanding with a contoured rubber block.



A FRICTION POLISH garners amazing results: a deep, shiny finish.

tool methods.

First, pen blanks are cut to length with a miniature miter box and a small, 24-tpi saw. Simple enough. But then comes the real head-scratcher: drilling a 7-mm hole straight through. Traditionally, this is done on a drill press table, but even with a specialized drilling vise, it's hard to get the hole centered accurately. Larry devised a hole-drilling jig using a keyless chuck and standard drill bit, which residents could use to drill the holes by hand. And it worked; no messed-up pen blanks littering the drill press table. "With the arrangement of this jig, they can do it right the first time. It gives them confidence up front," he says. It takes most of the Penwrights 10-20 minutes to drill through a blank by hand. They use Titebond III to glue brass tubes into the holes, rather than the CA glue used by most penmakers.

Probably the biggest challenge was figuring out how to work the wood blank down to the proper dimensions without using a lathe. Larry had a hunch that it could be done with abrasives alone, and found the perfect product: a large sanding block that takes standard 3" x 21" belts. He designed a cradle to hold the block, and non-slip pads keep the cradle steady on a table-top.

Now Larry needed a way for the Penwrights to "turn" the blanks against

the abrasive surface. He created a hand mandrel (see illustration on page 58) that works much like a mandrel on a lathe, but with a simple and ingenious modification. Instead of a single bushing on either side of the blank, Larry nests one set of bushings inside another, slightly larger set. Once a resident sands a blank to the outer bushings, those bushings are removed to reveal the smaller ones and the large sanding block is replaced by a small, contoured rubber block. At that point, the resident sands to the smaller bushings, moving up through sandpaper grits toward a perfectly round, smooth shape.

Larry looked into using a hand-



A STANDARD PEN PRESS finishes the job. Note the "story board" used to organize pen parts for assembly.

powered pen mill to square the ends of the pen segments and remove excess glue, but found that at a slow speed the mill would chew, rather than cut, the wood. So he created yet another tool, a hand-powered sanding disc with a cradle to keep the work square.

"Then you just apply a friction polish and rub like crazy," Larry says. "You'll come up with a finish that is as good as you'll find with most anybody, using all the power tools in the world to do the same thing." Once the blanks are complete, the pens are assembled with a pen press.

Wood therapy

This simple wood-working process has changed everything for Patty, whose job includes finding ways for residents to enjoyably fill their days at Arborwood. Alzheimer's disease is challenging for caregivers in many ways. As it progresses,



Delores Waite
exotic &
domestic woods

it often robs its victims of recent memories, and of mental capacity for activities they previously enjoyed. It can cause confusion, personality changes and deep depression. Alzheimer's is a prevalent problem for seniors; one in 10 people over 65 have the disease, as do nearly half of those over 85. Safe, engaging projects that improve the quality of life for people with dementia are treasured gems.

When she first met Larry, Patty wanted to try out "pet therapy." Larry had visited area nursing homes with his four dachshunds (Sis, LJ, Mae and Fritz), all of whom will sit quietly for

hours in any lap. But he wanted a project with staying power, one that could continue even through days when he wasn't there.

"In December 2004, Larry came to visit me because he had this grand



THE DYNAMIC DUO of volunteer and inventor Larry Beckwith, left, and life enrichment coordinator Patty Piechocki, right, make the Penwrights program happen. They are pictured with residents Christyl Moryl and Harry Mrozinski.

plan," Patty recalls. "He showed me how it worked and said, 'Your residents can do this.'" She had especially been looking for a good activity for her male residents, and woodworking fit the bill.

Some residents are hesitant to try making a pen, and that's where Larry's canine quartet comes in. "Those who think they can't do it will come anyway, because everybody loves to see the puppy dogs," Patty says. "They sit there and watch all the action." One 93-year-old woman attended every week for months, sitting quietly with a dog, then finally decided she'd like to make a pen of her own.

The physical activity of making pens is obviously a healthy addition to a

resident's schedule. But at Arborwood, the social and psychological benefits surpassed everyone's expectations. Larry and Patty agree the program builds incredible camaraderie between residents, who spend hours not only making pens, but talking about them. "The ladies are talking to each other a little more; they're more positive," Patty says. "They are making pens for their grandkids, and talking about Alzheimer's charities, the Memory Walk, what's going to happen with the money they raise."

Patty says many family members have noticed changes for the better in their loved ones' moods. "Physicians are stopping me to say they can see a difference in the residents," she says. Another

ALZHEIMER'S AND WOODWORKING

Dr. Peter Lichtenberg, a geriatric neuropsychiatrist and director of the Institute of Gerontology at Wayne State University in Detroit, says artistic and creative experiences are therapeutic for dementia patients, especially when they tap into past skills or experience. Caregivers must take initiative to create these experiences, because while someone with dementia might not be able to plan or initiate a project, he or she often is perfectly capable of executing it. "Anytime you can find an activity that has a motor component, such as painting and woodworking, it's a good thing for Alzheimer's patients and older adults in general," he says. More simply put, "People get bored when they're not doing fun things. We need to get them involved."



*schoolteacher's pen
in bloodwood and
ebony*

Harry Mrozinski
rosewood

remarkable benefit of the program is that the ability of a resident to carry out the ordered steps of the pen-making process can assist, at least anecdotally,

with tracking the progress of his or her dementia. Patty keeps a watchful eye on the Penwrights, and a staff psychiatrist often consults with her on how his patients are doing with the work.

Patty still marvels at the success of the project. “For me, this is a real triumph,” she says. “This is something I’ve been seeking for 10 years.”

An inspiring path

Larry has been volunteering with seniors for more than 15 years. “Larry is so motivated and humble. He is compassionate and very dedicated to senior citizens,” Patty said. Earlier this year, Larry was recognized by the state of Indiana as Senior Volunteer of the Year. He thinks the recognition is largely due to the Penwright program, which he says has the potential to truly improve the quality of life for many seniors with dementia.

He would like to see similar programs adopted at other extended care facilities.

Larry’s close friend, retired Catholic priest Ed Ruetz, recalls the time Larry showed him his pen-making idea during one of their monthly breakfasts together. “Utilizing our restaurant table, Larry had just shown me a hand mandrel, a hole-drilling jig and some square blanks of wood. He illustrated how the patients at the Arborwood could use these tools

to create beautiful pens.” Father Ed was deeply impressed, and knew Larry to be a compassionate Christian who had dedicated himself to serving others.

Just as working with seniors fills Larry’s life with purpose, making pens gives the Penwrights a sense of purpose and belonging that may have been sorely lacking. “Maybe at one point in time, woodworking was a tremendous thing in their lives and suddenly, they’re in a nursing home and it’s flat-out gone,” Larry said. “Having something to do with wood is meaningful, and makes them feel they have a purpose.”

What’s more, that purpose extends to the outside world. Last Christmas, they put off a large order for matching red-and-green sets until the following year. The customer was happy to wait. The pens made by the Penwrights are beautiful, heirloom-quality work, Larry said, and often are precious tokens of affection. “Had my mother made a pen in the nursing home and given it to me, I would have treasured it forever.”

Larry treasures the memory of helping one resident, whose illness has since



EVERYBODY HELPS in her own way. Sis, honorary member of the Penwrights, keeps Florence Bronstetter company at the pen press.

rapidly progressed, make her own pen. “One of the highlights of my life was the day she finished making the pen parts and we helped her put the pen together. She sat holding that pen palms-up, and she just looked at it and said, ‘That’s so beautiful. That’s so beautiful. That’s so beautiful.’ She must have said that a hundred times.”

— Sarah Brady is a contributing editor to Woodcraft Magazine.



Florence Bronstetter Christmas pen

STARTING YOUR OWN PENWRIGHTS GROUP

The Penwright program helps Alzheimer’s patients and other nursing home residents create wood pens at Arborwood Assisted Living Center. If you’re a woodworker with an interest in helping others, you might be wondering how to start a group of your own. “My goal, now that the program is proven, is for it to be adopted by as many other institutions and groups as possible,” says Larry Beckwith, who invented a system for turning pens without power tools. Here are some tips on starting your own group.

1. Make the tools — and some pens — first. The hand mandrel is a simple device with easy-to-find components, so try making one and using it with a large sanding block. Avoid the temptation to power on your drill press, and rig up a hand-drilling jig instead. Make a pen from start to finish without power tools, and make sure your method is repeatable.

2. Contact extended care facilities to find out about their residents. Pen making has worked at Arborwood for patients with mild to moderate dementia. But it might not be right for every home. “Larry went several places before he came here,” says Patty Piechocki, life enrichment coordinator, who worked with Larry to bring the program to Arborwood. “Every population is a little different. You need to adapt to what they need, and be patient and creative.”

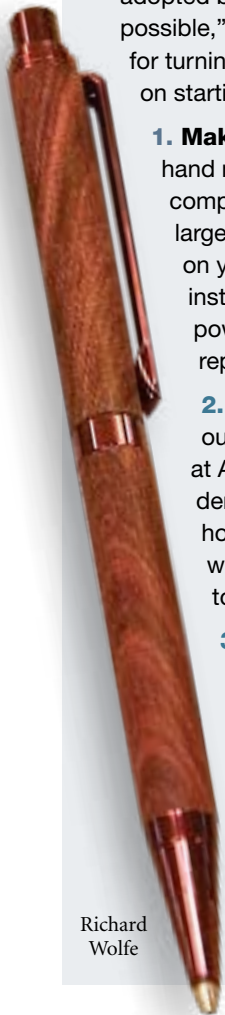
3. Demonstrate the process of making a pen, especially once you find someone who is interested in the program. “Show them how easy and safe these methods are. Demonstrate the mechanics for them,” Patty says.

4. Be aware of state regulations that govern safety and other aspects of extended care facilities. Caregivers must follow many rules in treating their residents, and you will be subject to the same parameters.

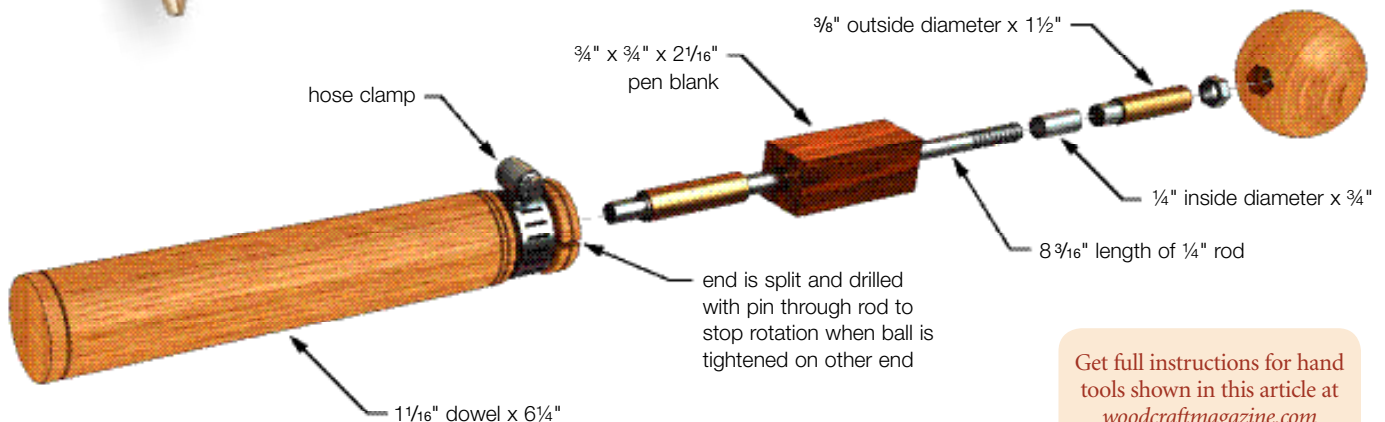
5. Seek help from woodworking friends. Volunteering to start and run a Penwright program is a significant time investment. Sharing the workload can make all the difference in the success of your program — and in how much you enjoy it.



START GATHERING THE SUPPLIES you will need to make specialized tools for making pens by hand. Items include a keyless chuck, 7-mm drill bit, hose clamp, and bushings in two sizes.



Richard Wolfe



Get full instructions for hand tools shown in this article at woodcraftmagazine.com

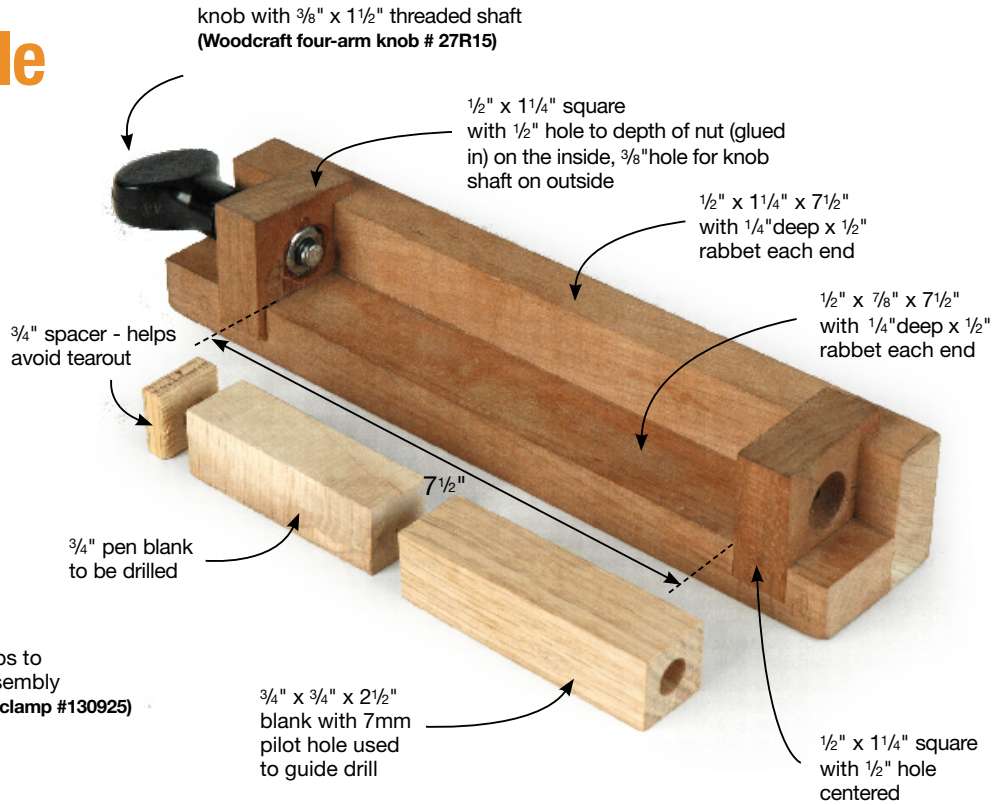
Below is additional information about the tools developed by Larry Beckwith and used by the Penwrights in the article "From the Hands of Alzheimer's". Feel free to modify the parts and processes to suit your individual needs. Where applicable, part numbers for comparable Woodcraft products are supplied.

Drilling Cradle



keyless chuck with 7mm drill bit

mini-clamps to secure assembly (Woodcraft clamp #130925)



$1\frac{1}{16}$ " x $6\frac{1}{4}$ " dowel handle with end split and drilled with pin through rod to stop rotation, plus hose clamp

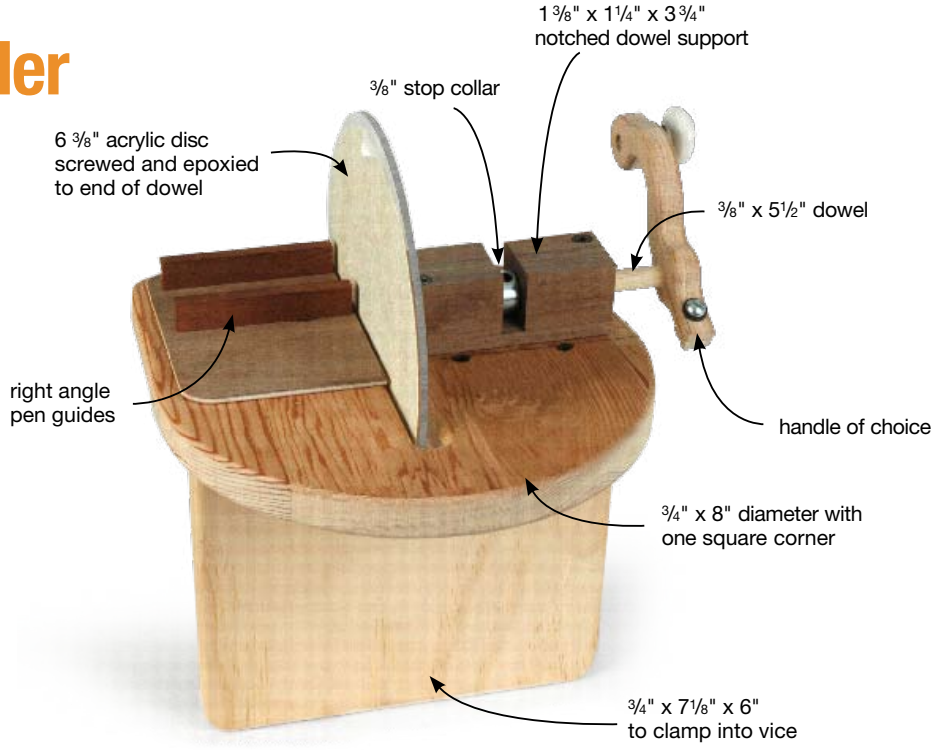
Hand Mandrel



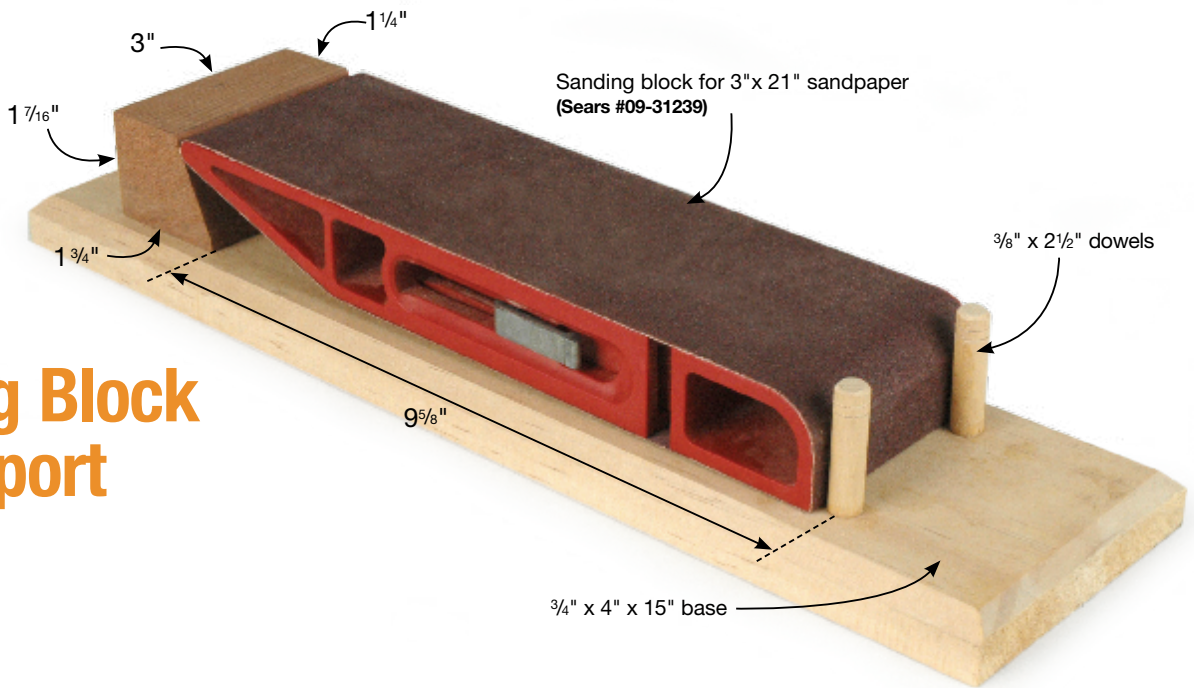
Hand Disc Sander



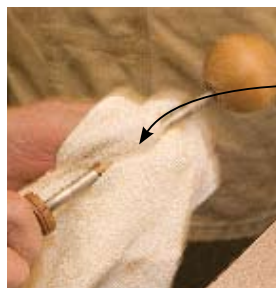
A complete hand-operated precision sander is available from Woodcraft (Part #147318)



Sanding Block Support



Final sanding using 600-grit sandpaper and contour sanding block (Woodcraft #14958)



Use wipe-on finish of your choice (Shellawax Friction Polish, Penn State #PKSWAXL1 or Mylands Friction Polish, Woodcraft #813772)