Spotlight

A fine way to say thanks!

Converting their 13-acre backyard into an arboretum was a big step for Bill and Fran Bickelhaupt, but it seemed the natural way to say thanks to their home town of Clinton, Iowa, where they’d prospered during their working years. Determined to do it properly, the Bickelhaupts took botany classes, became experts on local plants and trees, then opened up their garden as a living classroom, where nature lovers come to study or just watch the flowers grow. Clinton has returned the compliment with an award from Mount St. Clare College, acknowledging the couple’s hard work and dedication to their local community.

Puzzle expert seeks no easy answers

When Jerry Slocum was eight years old, his parents gave him a small wooden puzzle as a birthday present. Now, 46 years later, Slocum has a collection that tops 10,000 puzzles, the best of which are currently on display at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Museum in Cambridge. The exhibit will travel to New York and St. Paul, Minnesota, before going overseas.

Slocum collects books on puzzles, too. He has more than 2,000 and, with fellow puzzle fan Jack Botermans, has just published his own book: Puzzles Old and New: How to Make and Solve Them (University of Washington Press). Now that his exhibit is on the road, Slocum is back on the trail of new puzzles. “As long as they keep inventing them,” he says, “I’ll keep collecting them.”

From corsets to corkscrews

Inventor Jacob Rabinow claims he learned his technical trade at his mother’s knee. “She custom-made corsets for fat ladies,” he recalls, “and I used to cut the stays.”

Rabinow’s early training has resulted in modern designs that are stylish and effective as those his mother made. His idea for a straight-armed turntable pickup (shown at left) was snapped up by Bang & Olufsen and Sony for their high-quality stereo systems. The design is included, along with his reading machine and clock regulator, in the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History. Rabinow also brought us the mail-sorting machine and the magnetic-particle clutch now used in the Subaru and other automobiles.

When he’s not reinventing the clutch, Rabinow gets a kick out of whipping up oddball creations for special occasions. When a French television crew came to interview him, he mischievously produced a one-of-a-kind corkscrew that pulls corks out of wine bottles with one quick tug. And when a short friend complained that her feet always dangled from chairs in theatres and cinemas, he designed a lightweight portable footstool.

“Of all my inventions, the only one that made money was the clock regulator,” says Rabinow. “It was used in all the American cars before quartz clocks made it redundant.” Getting rich would be nice, he agrees, but in the meantime, he says, “I’m having lots of fun!”

Mom still a Mom, even in jail

Children are the hidden victims of the penal system, says Sister Elaine Rouet. “When mothers go to jail, their children are punished, too—they grow up motherless.”

A sister of St. Joseph Convent of Brentwood, Long Island, New York, Rouet provides family liaison at the Bedford Correctional Facility. She founded the prison’s children’s center, where inmates visit with their offspring, and helped set up the country’s first prison nursery. She also established Providence House, which offers shelter and counseling for ex-offenders and their children.

“Children belong with their mothers,” says Rouet. “We can’t condone the crime but we have to find other means of punishment; otherwise the system will just continue.”