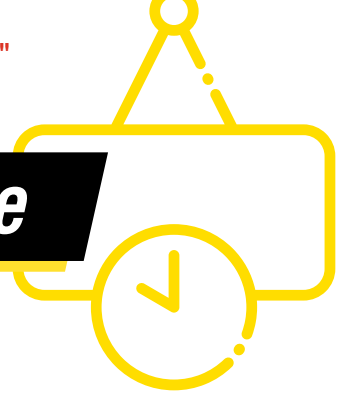


Closing Up Shop for the Last Time



Mike Peace

Woodturners are unique individuals, but we all have one thing in common: We will grow older and eventually become unable to continue turning, all too often leaving someone to deal with our shop and tools.

A funny T-shirt says, "He who dies with the most tools wins." My friend Frank was always wearing a hat with that saying. He was active, teaching at the local Woodcraft store and as a demonstrator in our region. Frank was scheduled to do a demo for our club when he passed away unexpectedly. Well, you can't take tools with you. Or as one person commented, "I never saw a hearse pulling a U-Haul trailer."

I helped a widow sort out her husband's shop after he died of Covid. He was a long-time member of my club and had an extensive shop. Unfortunately, he made no advance arrangements. This kind of experience reminds us of

our mortality and should encourage us to think about how to deal with our own shop. Let's explore some options in case we are no longer around to *close our shop for the last time*. These suggestions are also relevant for those who choose to or must give up woodturning for health reasons.

Procrastination kicks in when there is something we don't want to deal with. But I believe we should plan ahead to lessen the burden on the loved ones we leave behind.

Woodturners' situations

Turners often fall in one of these categories:

Those who no longer turn due to health reasons

A woodturner I knew bought a large expensive lathe late in life and was enjoying his retirement pastime. Then he had a recurrence of cancer, and his brother, who was handling his affairs, knew nothing about woodturning. I provided him with contact information for several clubs within a couple hours' drive that probably had a member interested in getting a nice used lathe at a reasonable price.

Those who no longer have an interest in turning

They may not have turned in years. I see this in a number of club members who might be referred to as *inactive* hobbyists. They may still come to club meetings for social reasons or to leave the house for a while. They may still have an interest in watching someone else turn but don't want to do it themselves.

People in either of the above two categories may be capable of disposing of their shop themselves or with some assistance. If so, consider clearing out your shop *now*, while you can. At least deal with some simple tasks: get rid of wood too cracked to turn, boxes of extra bowls, platters, or other projects started but not finished; give away finished projects that won't be displayed around the house; dispose of old finishes—*responsibly*; sell or give away what you can and throw away the rest.

Those who are still actively turning

People in this category would be wise to take some *planning actions* now:

- Identify shop items that have not been used in more than a year and consider getting rid of them.
- Offer wood in excess of your needs to a club raffle. Do not include firewood! Taking old, cracked wood that you would not turn yourself means you will have wasted your time hauling it for someone else to dispose of.
- Get rid of old turning magazines that typically have no dollar value. Take a few to a club meeting for a visitor or new turner. Past *American Woodturner* copies can provide info about the AAW and what the organization offers a new turner. Perhaps they could be thrown in as sizzle if you are selling something to a new woodturner. But best is probably just to throw them in the recycle bin.
- Turning DVDs and VHS tapes should hit the trash. Who still owns the players for them? If your club has a library, they might want your old DVDs and tapes, but probably not. Many clubs have abandoned libraries,

He'll be turning in his grave, so we buried him with his tools.



Debra Higley

as there is very little interest in them. YouTube and interactive remote demos (IRDs) have pretty much replaced the old formats. Plus, it is much easier to look up an old *American Woodturner* article in the AAW's digital archives than to search through a stack of old journals in the basement.

- Most important is to prepare a written plan to assist the person who will be left with the task of liquidating your shop. (See *What's in a Written Plan?* sidebar.) It is possible your residence will go on the market and a workshop full of equipment, wood, and tools is not going to help!

Possible sales venues

- Local woodturning clubs
- Social media, such as Facebook Marketplace, a neighborhood Facebook page, and NextDoor
- eBay
- Craigslist
- Yard or estate sale
- Online outlets, including forums like the AAW Forum's Woodturning Marketplace (aawforum.org/community) or SawMillCreek.org. Smaller tools that can be easily packed and shipped can often be sold online. But be prepared, as this can take significant work, including packaging and figuring out how to get paid for shipping costs.

Pricing

There is an old joke among woodturners that our biggest fear is our spouse selling our tools for what we *said* we paid for them! A general rule of thumb is that 50% of current retail value is a good starting price for many tools. Tools that might go more readily at a higher price, perhaps 60% to 75% of retail value, include higher-end equipment with cast iron like jointers, table saws, band-saws, and lathes. Sought after items like chucks would also fall into this category.

Amazon is a good tool for determining pricing, and items that aren't listed on

Amazon can often be found at wood-working or woodturning vendor sites.

If you are in a club or there is one nearby, they will likely be happy to post a classified ad for little or nothing on their chapter website, Facebook page, or in a newsletter or email distribution, as most clubs consider this as a valuable service for members.

When preparing your list of tools, describe each item as clearly as possible and include model numbers, correct titles, and accurate condition. Sometimes providing the current retail price is a useful reference. Voltage is important. In the U.S. it is 110V, but larger equipment may require 220V, which not all shops have. Providing an asking price will get a better response. Publish contact information and city location, so you won't waste time on calls from folks too far away. Publish the list as a PDF if you are expecting it to be distributed by email.

Be realistic with pricing expectations. I know of one club member with health issues who priced his tools and equipment too close to full retail when selling his home to move into assisted living. It took a long time with many price reductions and the hassle and expense of moving things into a storage unit.

When you've been asked to help

What should you do if you get a call to help with closing someone's shop for the last time? First, you'll have to decide if you are willing to spend the time needed. One turning friend that had considerable experience in this area suggested if dealing with someone you do not know, consider pricing your assistance at an hourly rate for a minimum of two hours. This makes it a business arrangement and may rule out folks who might be difficult to deal with or have unrealistic expectations. He said he put in two days of pricing assistance for a widow, only to have a family member come in with a truck ►

What's in a Written Plan?

- Document your tools and leave a printed list where it can be easily found. Indicate any tools that are to be given or donated to a specific family member, friend, or organization. If you decide to donate tools to a charitable nonprofit organization in the U.S., such as a local woodturning guild, the estate may qualify for a tax deduction. Seek the advice of a qualified tax advisor for details.
- In the case of someone with a terminal illness, if tools are to be sold after the turner's death to a specific recipient, negotiate and document agreed-upon sale prices.
- If there are no family members or friends interested in the tools, document the method of disposal, along with appropriate details and contact information. This could include the use of a professional auction service, relying on a knowledgeable and trusted friend, or full-service help from a person familiar with tool pricing and selling alternatives. This selling process can take considerable time, so if a friend is to be recruited, document agreed-upon compensation for their time and expertise.
- After you choose an approach and document the plan in writing, communicate the plan details with your family, including the location of the written document (perhaps stored with other important papers such as your will or in a binder in a prominent place in your shop). This will help alleviate some of the stress on your next of kin upon your death.

Accumulated wood



When a shop must be closed for the last time, what to do with the inevitable accumulation of turning stock and rough-turned bowls?

and haul everything off, so his time was completely wasted.

One of the biggest value-added ways you can help is to document the items and group things that logically go together. For example, keep extra chuck jaws with the chuck. For a lathe, gather and put with it all of the original equipment, such as faceplates, drives, etc. In a recent situation, I found a set of wheels and a pipe-like handle in a storage room for the shop. The widow never would have recognized these items as a Oneway lathe accessory (used to move the lathe) that sells new for \$300.

Another service you can provide is to be in attendance at a garage or yard sale to help deal with customers, answer questions, and negotiate prices. Many widows would be reluctant to have strangers traipsing through the house and shop unattended.

Evaluate wood left over in the shop. Exotic blanks, bowl blanks, and roughed out bowls without cracks, sawn slabs, and burls have value. Old dried and cracked wood should be assessed to determine if it is usable or good only for firewood.

Chances are the family will have pulled any completed turned items they felt a relative might want. Remaining items can be sold or donated. My club has had some success in selling such items at our annual

Unused but still lingering



Stacks of magazines, journals, and books: are they continuing to prove useful?



Christmas party auction/raffle. Places to donate might include any nonprofit that conducts fundraising auctions and raffles. My local United Way was happy to take small turnings, which they added to baskets they were auctioning or raffling or giving to donors.

For many widows whose spouse belonged to a woodturning guild, one option is to donate the entire shop to the club in exchange for them hauling everything away. If the club is a nonprofit organization, they can provide a tax receipt, although nowadays with high standard deductions, this may not be a big deal—but it might be. This option might be appealing if the shop must be cleaned out quickly so the house can be sold, or if the next of kin is out of state.

A variation is to split the final proceeds between the club and the widow. If you are a club member, consider suggesting this to the leadership as a service your chapter can provide. If the club adopts this practice, document the process, including rules for volunteers. Some folks have different views on what is fair or reasonable, so fence in parameters for integrity—what volunteers can or cannot do in terms of cash or tools on the side. A few years ago, our club hosted a professional turner who likely could afford whatever he wanted. He overheard a conversation at a club meeting about

a widow wanting to sell her husband's Powermatic lathe. He swooped in on the widow with a lowball offer. We never saw him again, which was fortunate for all. In summary, plan ahead. Take responsibility for your hobby and ease the burden on others. ■

Mike Peace is active in three clubs in the Atlanta area and is a virtual member of another. He regularly uploads woodturning educational videos to his YouTube channel, Mike Peace Woodturning. Mike worked as a software project manager before retirement. After serving on active duty in the U.S. Army, Mike stayed active as a reservist, retiring with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. For more, visit mikepeacewoodturning.com.

FOR FURTHER READING

EXPLORE!

For more useful information on this topic, check out the AAW's online archives. Log in at woodturner.org and use the Explore! search tool to find these articles:

- "From the Benefit of Experience: Clean Your Shop!" by Dale Larson, February 2021 *AW* (vol 36, no 1, page 20)
- "Tips for Selling Tools," by Jeff King, June 2024 *AW* (vol 39, no 3, page 10)

