

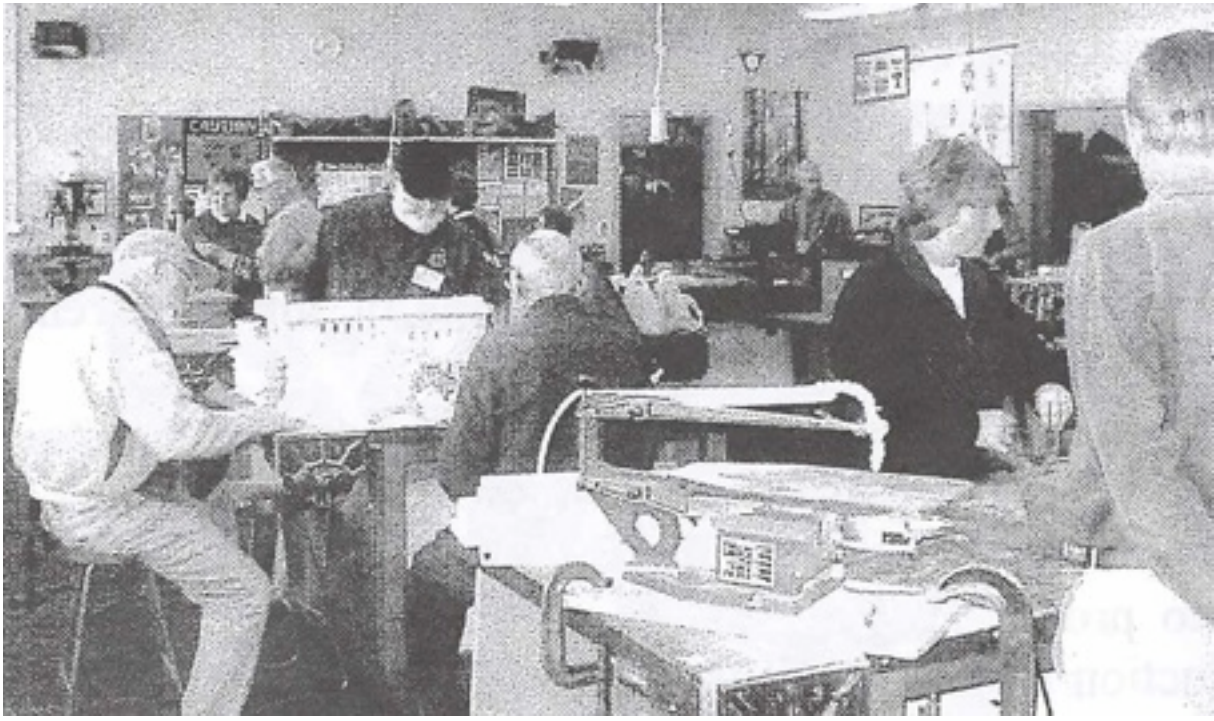
# TOYMENDOUS

The earliest reference that can be found about the origins of Toymendous was in one of the Woodgroups Newsletters in 1988 when then President Dick Pillar suggested, as a project, that members of the Group could make wooden toys and donate them to a charitable organisation for distribution to disadvantaged children. This was adopted and in its first year members donated fifty toys, made in their own sheds using their own equipment, to the Salvation Army.

The project quickly formed into an organised monthly activity and adopted the name, Toymendous, that has now been officially registered.

From humble beginnings the group has grown over the past fifteen years and now attracts considerable recognition and accolades for the contribution it has made and continues to make toward supporting the community need to bring some cheer to children of disadvantaged families at Christmas. Dick Pillar and Ainslie Pyne were the early co-ordinators of the project running monthly workshops. In the early 1990' s Bob Mills, later joined by Neil Schulz, became the coordinators with Neil holding onto the job for ten years before passing over to Bill Ashman who currently has the unenviable task of bringing it all together.

In those early years the group operated with members bringing their own machinery and tools to the various venues, including Regency Park Community Centre, Goodwood Tech High and Salesian College. They were arduous days as not only did individual members load up their vehicles with their personal equipment, but it also meant lugging timber to and from each of the workshops. These venues did not provide storage facilities of any size. Bruce Elix would rock up with his small Toyota Corolla station wagon loaded to the hilt, Neil Schulz, likewise, in "Suzie" and Bob Mills often borrowed the next door neighbour's Dodge ute laden with timber off cuts and this went on for five or six years before we moved into Thebarton Senior College where we are now based. Weekly searches went on in new housing developments for timber, collecting from four housing companies who gave us written permission to venture onto their sites. We had to design toys to suit the limited range of timbers we could scrounge, individuals donated bits and pieces like nails, the odd screw, glue and paint. It was a committed effort by a few people to get the job done. We had no funds; however the Woodgroup did pay for the hire of workshop facilities.



*A typical Toymendous workshop in 2003. Heads down finishing off nearly 900 toys for donation to charity.*

Painting of toys were done by hand usually in Bob Mill's shed, gatherings happened in Schulzie's shed to paint 2500 wheels each year and the toys were handed over annually at the Christmas wind up of the Woodgroup. We demonstrated at the Sunday Mail Home Show and we quickly realised that our toys were a saleable commodity. I remember the very first show we demonstrated at when Chris Selfe Machinery got behind us and loaned us lathes, drill presses etc to set up at our first demonstration. An appreciated gesture at that time when business confidence was down and we were a little apprehensive about making such approaches.

The demand was growing fast and members were growing tired of all the to and fro with machinery and equipment and interest in the group was waning a little. In 1992 Neil & Bob wondered what they could do to reinvigorate the group and decided one of the things would be to ease the burden on participants in both cost and effort. So they set about seeking sponsors to offset the cost and effort members were making. They knew they had an appealing product, certainly knew there was a demand for it in the community so they set about seeking sponsors. Neil wrote to many businesses and the very first to come on board were Ryobi with the donation of a Vertical Oscillating Drum Sander and Carbatec with a scroll saw. Shipway Spescoat and WattyI came on line with paint, Bone Timber with doweling and other hardware like nails, Universal Fasteners with screws, The Casket Company with Cedar timber and Cabdoors with hardwood off cuts, Rokset with paint brushes, Sabco with storage containers, Mik International with scroll saw

blades. This was followed by help with power tools through businesses like David Trembath Agencies and Triton and many of these companies continue to support the group ten years on. We thank all of our sponsors, large or small, current or past, for their ongoing support over the many years.

But the one feature of these "heady" years has been the support and contribution of government especially the State, through the Office for the Ageing, who has given us many grants to purchase equipment. This allowed the group to produce more toys, improve the quality of the product and make production that little bit easier. Local government through the Cities of Charles Sturt and West Torrens for equipment and hire grants. Today Toymendous would have acquired in excess of \$10,000 in capital assets.

Each year the group sells about 200 of its toys at the Christmas Earth Fair and this raises more than enough finances to ensure that, even without financial supplementation through grants, the SIG can continue its work. Patrons comment very favourably on our purpose for making them and the quality of the toy themselves.

A conservative estimate of the number of toys made over the past fifteen years would be about 12,000. The most made in one year was 1249 but alas as we all grow older, slow down a bit and health issues become more prevalent the number of toys produced has dropped to about 800 per year which appears manageable. There have been many characters through the group over the years. Some have been loyal participants for more than twelve years others come and go and it is the common purpose of "bringing joy to kids" and the camaraderie within the group that keeps it together and going strong. If you are going to join Toymendous you certainly need a sense of humour and a "thick hide".

Today the group operates much the same but the work load is shared a little more. The SIG has a great relationship with its landlord the Thebarton Senior College and the emphasis turns more toward organization and coordination than having to search for supply. More machinery to use, more aids to help production, spray painting rather than hand painting, wider range of materials available and we are better and wider known in the community. The group operates efficiently with an average attendance between 15-20 people but at one stage after exposure through the media membership had to be capped at 30 with a waiting list to get in.



*Neil Schulz with Andrew Clarke from Wesley Uniting Mission during handover of toys 2002.  
In background Bob Lloyd, Ron Crowhurst and Ron Swinburne*



*Bill Ashman, Coordinator Toymendous, receives a donation of blades from John Sharpe, Director MiK International*