

Hanover native shares Bonsai tree enthusiasm

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By **LORI WINCE**

ThisWeek Staff Writer

Working with Bonsai trees is like having a farm: Bonsai owners can no more leave their trees than farmers can leave their cattle.

"We don't go on vacation," said Jeff Carr, owner of Staselwood Bonsai Studio in Hanover.

A civil engineer working by day for ADR and Associates in Newark, Carr takes on another occupation when he returns each evening to his home in Hanover.

Bonsai trees are considered by many to be pieces of art -- trees shaped and pruned to form interesting, living shapes.

The process requires patience and attention. Plants must be watered daily and trimmed in spring to start the shaping process. Carr said branches are wired in an effort to train the plant to grow a certain way. Wires must be removed in a timely fashion so as not to scar the branches.

Because the plants are kept in an inorganic soil, the trees must be fed with fertilizer every other week.

"They have to be trimmed, watered and fed on a miniature scale and on a more frequent scale," Carr said.

Carr has never been to China, where Bonsai originated, or to Japan, which is known for refining the art of Bonsai, but he served in the military and traveled extensively before returning home to Hanover. Instead of finding a love of Bonsai in



By Adam Cairns/ThisWeek

Jeff Carr stands among his Bonsai trees in a greenhouse behind his Hanover home.

the countries that most appreciate it, he formed a connection to the miniature cultivated trees in a more American way.

He bought one at Lowe's Home Improvement Center in Savannah, Ga.

"I subsequently killed it," Carr laughed.

He didn't stop trying, though.

"I vowed not to let that little tree get the best of me," he said.

Ten years later and a long way from wanting to be involved with his wife, Heather's, love of gardening, Carr now has about 500 trees -- either finished or in the process of being shaped -- at his studio in Hanover.

He has worked with teachers who have studied the art of Bonsai in Japan, and he now helps others learn the craft, selling supplies out of his studio.

"I've studied with an international Bonsai artist for one week and with a lot of different teachers," Carr said. "It's a lot of fun."

Although some people may think all Bonsai trees are an indoor plant, Carr said most are meant to be outside.

"There are no indoor trees; that's an oxymoron," Carr said. "The two are not synonymous. Woody plants do not grow indoors."

Carr has to separate trees that grow in warmer climates from hardier trees. He has two separate greenhouses, one of which is kept above 55 degrees all year long. The other stays only about 10 degrees above the outside temperature. More importantly, both greenhouses protect the delicate trees from wind and frost, two elements that can injure the Bonsai, Carr said.

"They can't be exposed to harsh conditions," he said.

Because he has a studio set up to protect plants, Carr often ends up "tree sitting," a term probably known only to Bonsai enthusiasts. He said he often keeps plants from September to April for friends and fellow enthusiasts.

When Carr began his hobby, he said, there was little information on the Internet about Bonsai trees and few places to buy supplies. In recent years, more stores have opened and more Bonsai clubs have begun.

The Pun-Ching Bonsai Club of Newark now has 20 to 25 members and meets monthly at The Dawe's Arboretum on state Route 13, a few miles south of Newark. Most of the major cities in Ohio have Bonsai clubs, and Carr said his studio in its somewhat remote location gets about one to two customers by appointment each weekend.

He teaches classes on working with Bonsai at The Works in downtown Newark, where he will display some of his Bonsai during the opening of "Haiku in Pigment --

The Art of Russell Merritt." The show opens Friday, April 27, when Carr will have his trees on display.

He said he cannot display the trees throughout the entire show, which runs through May 26, because of the care required to keep the trees alive and in good condition.

The opening reception will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. at the gallery, 54 S. Second St. in Newark.

The show includes the work of Merritt, who studies Japanese art and teaches art classes at The Works and other places in Ohio.

The Merritt exhibit will include Sumi-e, which are Japanese ink paintings; watercolors; cartoons; comic-book art and Manga, according to information from The Works.

The gallery is open from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday.

Carr said he will have information on Bonsai available at the gallery during the show, but he will only have trees there until April 27.

More information on Bonsai can be obtained through his Website, www.staselwoodBonsai.com, or on The Works' exhibit at www.attheworks.org.