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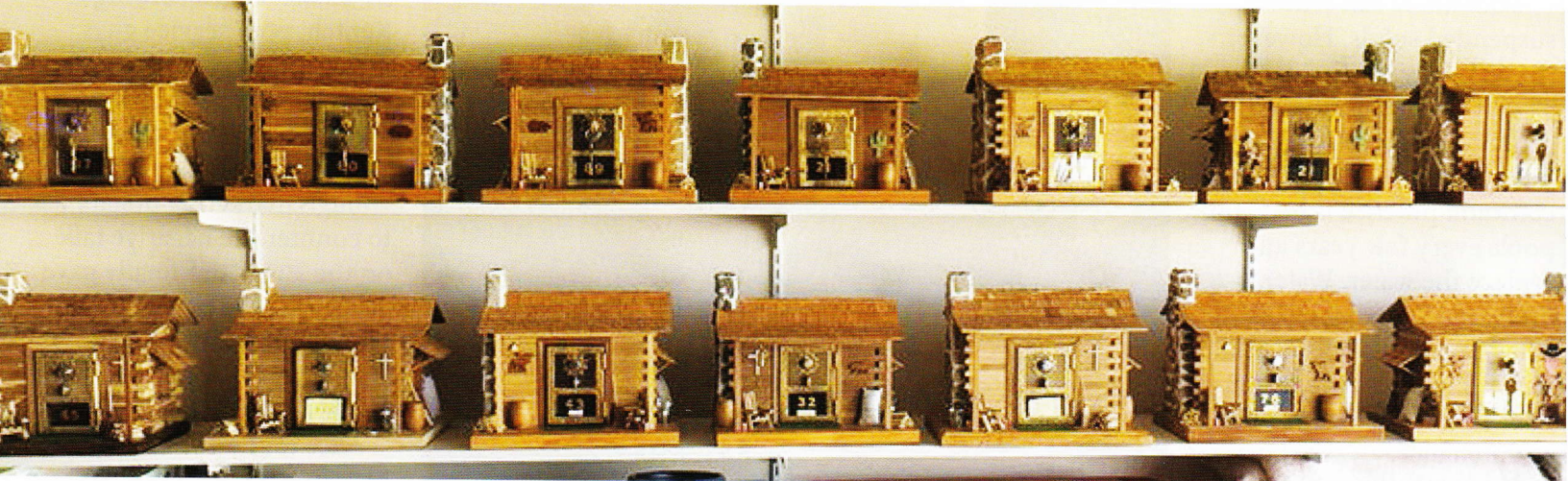
ARIZONA'S COASTAL LIFE



On the water

From new watercrafts to luxury concierge service, there are lots of ways to enjoy Lake Havasu in the summer





A HOBBY TO BANK ON

Thanks to a gift of 60 old locks from a retiring postmaster, Ron Miller discovered a love for creating Tennessee cabin coin banks

Ron Miller traveled in an RV through all 48 of the contiguous states after he retired from the Department of the Navy as a safety inspector. He built a home in Lake Havasu City in 2003, “to enjoy the best of both worlds — terrific winters and RV trips in the summer to beat the heat.”

That’s when Miller transformed his garage into a workshop, so he could create a product he had dreamed of for years — Tennessee cabin coin banks. Using 60 official post office locks given to him by a former postmaster, he began building miniature cabins modeled after the ones he had seen in the foothills of the Smokey Mountains.

“My (late) wife and I accepted job offers to be ride attendants at Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, which is located very close to the Smokey Mountain National Park,” he said. “This is where I came up with the idea.”

Miller starts with a rectangular block of wood about three-quarters of an inch thick. He uses “whatever wood is available at the time,” such as oak, pine, cedar, cherry, or walnut. The basic design includes a fireplace chimney on one end and a window on the other. Each cottage has a shake roof with a covered porch. The brass coin slot is located on the backside of the roof. The post office locks are between 50 and 75 years old and are the front doors to the cabins. Both key and combination locks are used.

His attention to detail gives each log cabin a unique and authentic appearance. For example, a cabin can be enhanced



Ron Miller gives each of his Tennessee cabin coin banks unique touches, such as a miniature stack of firewood or rustic chair. His favorite piece is a two-story outhouse, modeled after one he saw on a trip through Arkansas.

with accessories like a stack of firewood, a rustic chair, a mop and bucket, a sack of sugar, or even a bear holding a jar of honey. The exterior walls may be decorated with carvings, windows or crosses.

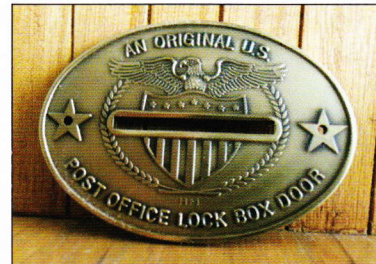
Ron's attention to detail served him well as a safety inspector for the Navy, a career which spanned 34 years in Washington state. He served at the Torpedo Station in Keyport and the Strategic Weapon Facility in Bangor. He retired from the National Guard as a major with 31 years of distinguished service at age 50.

Miller's passion these days is building those Tennessee cabin coin banks, a job from which he probably will never retire. He estimates he's made well over 100 of the little homes. During his summer RV trips, the Montana native sells some at a few craft events. Still, the majority of the coin banks are given away to friends, family and members of his church.

"In turn, I receive the satisfaction of each individual appreciation," he said. "I've enjoyed doing this woodwork. It keeps my mind busy and me occupied."

Ron and his wife Dee Ann have been married for seven years. They met at church and leaned on each other for support while grieving the deaths of their spouses. One day Ron invited Dee Ann to lunch. It was their first date.

"We get in the car and we're...on 95 out of town," Dee Ann recalled. "I thought maybe we're going to Kingman or Needles or someplace like that. Then he asked, 'Do you like hotdogs?'"



Each of Miller's coin banks show a meticulous attention to detail. Built from old post office boxes, they contain the original coin slots and lock mechanisms.

I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'They really have good hotdogs out at Home Depot.' I said, 'Okay. I like those, too. That would be fine.' When we made the left turn to go to Home Depot he says, 'We're going to the Golden Horse-shoe.' His humor is such, you never know what he's going to come up with next."

Miller hesitates to estimate how long he spends building each log home replica. "Good question, but I have no answer. I can work a few hours a day and quit. The next day I can pick up where I left off. I could venture a guess and say 20 hours."

Dee Ann disagrees. She says he spends more than 20 hours on each model. She is amazed by his patience to embellish the cabins.

"He puts a lot of heart into each cabin. When he builds a fireplace, it's one stone at a time. Every shingle is put on one at a time," she said, adding that each wood shingle must be beveled on Miller's sander before being glued to the roof.

One of his favorite pieces is a two-story outhouse, modeled after one he saw

on a trip through Arkansas, approximately 50 miles from Branson, Missouri.

"I came across a small gift shop out in the middle of nowhere in the Ozarks. A sign on the country road read, 'Booger Hollow, pop. 7 and one old coon dog.' Next to the gift shop was

a two-story outhouse. The stairs leading to the second level were roped off with a sign reading, 'Upstairs temporarily closed till we figure out the plumbing.'"

Ron's model of that outhouse sits on his desk at home. "You might say it's one-of-a-kind," he smiled.

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