

FOR RETIRED CARPENTER, IT'S HAMMER TIME



Frank Scordo with one of his favorite conversation pieces, a double-handled hammer. Some 1,200 tools from his collection are on display at the Shrewsbury Historical Society. (Photo by Dustin Racioppi; click to enlarge)

By DUSTIN RACIOPPI

For many retirees, the entry into the golden years is a chance to travel, spend more time on the golf course or play the spoiling grandparent.

But for retired carpenter Frank Scordo, post-employment means keeping up with a hobby that, for most, might just instantly pound the brain's snooze button: cultivating a collection of hammers.

We're not talking about a few dozen nail drivers on a shelf in his garage in Tinton Falls. Scordo takes pride in his "man cave," where hundreds of hammers clutter and slice the white walls into fragments.

Each one's got a story, too, and Scordo, 65, pulled down a couple favorites, or his "conversation starters."

There's the hammer with no claw, "for somebody who didn't make any mistakes." There's another the size of a small child used for hammering down wine barrels. The offensive-looking symbol on the head of another is not, in fact, a swastika, but an identifying mark lumber workers used to stamp into a tree to note that it was theirs.

His collection of nearly 2,000 hammers also includes the hard-to-find and hard-to-fathom. One hammer has a magnifying glass attached to it; another, a wrench. One, called a "salesman" hammer, is partially cut open to show the hammer's insides. Another hammer, called a "bill poster's

hammer," looks more like golf club and was use to post a notice or wanted sign on a tree or post. Scordo also says he has a hammer that was used on the construction of the Panama Canal.

It's a hobby Scordo stumbled upon about 20 years ago, when he was at a garage sale and bought some planes. These were like his gateway drug, and pretty soon he'd move on to the heavier stuff, the hammers.

"You just get carried away with it," he said.

Scordo knows he's among thin ranks of tool enthusiasts, drawing an esoteric pleasure from the simple structure of a handle and head. But he's actually a novice, he said, who studies the history of hammers and tools with fervor.

"This is a small collection," he said. "I thought I had a lot of hammers. There's guys that've written books, who have a million hammers."

Scordo's collection is split between his man cave and the [Shrewsbury Historical Society](#), to which he's loaned some 1,200 "hammers, picks, planes, augers, mallets, axes, drills, and other collectibles [that] showcase the creative talents of wood craftsmen, cabinet makers, railroad workers, cobblers, blacksmiths, tree men, surgeons, dentists, carpenters and plumbers," in the words of the society's website. If it wasn't divided up, the assemblage would surely be spread throughout his Tinton Falls two-story home, and there's just no room for that.

His wife, Patricia, is also a collector.

Stepping into their home is almost like stepping into a museum itself. Take a seat on one of the antique couches in the living room and you're faced with a vast collection of Santa Clause figurines, although the case won't hold all 850 of the ones she's amassed. Throughout the house, shelves, counters and available nooks are occupied by random figurines, old kerosene lamps, [Depression glass](#).

Then there's her collection of piano benches, which is scattered throughout the house, garage and attic.

"If you notice, we're into antiques," Scordo said.

The hammers certainly take up a lot of Scordo's free time, although he often plays with his grandchildren, who live next door. And when he can, Scordo tries to do some carpentry work on the side, mostly to stay active, he said — although there's an ulterior motive.

"I've got to keep busy," he said. "Just to make some more money to buy more hammers."

Scordo's hammers are on display from 10a to 2p on Saturdays at the Shrewsbury Historical Society at the borough municipal complex, Broad Street & Sycamore Avenue. Special group arrangements may be made by calling 732-747-3635.