



Michael Cyr sells carefully selected wood to C.F. Martin & Co., which will turn them into guitar sound boards. He also makes blanks for string instrument necks and other wooden parts that instrument makers can use.

Making music

Liberty shop helps turn Maine logs into guitars

BY SHELBY HARTIN
BDN STAFF

Michael Cyr strives for perfection. The wood he has pulled from mill yards must have an unrivaled strength and beauty and be free of discoloration, knots and rot. He could spend an hour walking up and down aisles where piles of red spruce, also known as Adirondack spruce, lie, looking at more than 1,000 cords of wood. But after looking at all that wood, he may only pull three or four logs — and he may only come home with one. These logs provide Cyr, a tonewood supplier, with the material used to run his business, Noteworthy Wood. Tonewood refers to woods used to make stringed instruments and that possess tonal properties, which means they produce different sounds depending on their weight, density and other factors. Cyr procures, prepares and sells this wood, which leaves his shop in Liberty as the beginnings of soundboards used for acoustic guitars by C.F. Martin & Co. “Red spruce is the holy grail for guitar wood,” Cyr said. Red spruce is the classic spruce species used for acoustic guitars. The wood is known for its stiffness, and it is difficult to



Michael Cyr draws the outline of a Martin guitar sound board on tonewood he cut from red spruce.

find pieces that are cosmetically perfect, but it's Cyr's job to try. “It's like an old saying in the Bible — ‘Many are called, but few are chosen.’ That's what it's like, but I'm getting better at it,” Cyr, who started his business in 2004, said. “You have to look at a lot, a lot of wood and just be patient, because after awhile, you start to see more and more indicators of quality.” Cyr has a history of working in the woods. He started as a forester in 1969 and has worked with wood ever since. In the 1980s, he did marketing work for the state and others, from mills to loggers. Most recently, he did procurement work, which involved buying and selling timber. Now, his business combines his passion for music, his work as a forester and his love of wood. “I used to sell thousands of truckloads of wood. ... Now I'm looking at individual logs, one at a time,” Cyr said.

Cyr's work starts with his suppliers. He gets logs pulled from various mill yards and from loggers around the state. “I go to mill yards to find this stuff, and I could spend a good hour walking up and down piles, maybe 1,000 cords of wood, and I'll find three or four logs, and then they pull those out, set them aside for me,” he said. Out of those three or four logs, Cyr is lucky if he finds one to bring home. Afterward comes the sawing. “It's not only pretty, but radial sawn wood pulls out all the good characteristics — all the strength, all the stiffness, all the sound,” Cyr said. Then comes the more detailed work, which takes place at his shop in Liberty. “It's like butchering up a really prime steer. Well the first thing you want is steak, right? My steak is here where I have a nice 10- or 12-inch piece,” Cyr said, motioning to

Prints give old story a new look

Artist illustrates ‘Christmas in Maine’

BY SARAH WALKER CARON
BDN STAFF

In 1941, Pulitzer Prize-winning power Robert T. Tristram Coffin wrote “Christmas in Maine,” a depiction of what a perfect Maine Christmas is like — from the farmhouse stuffed with aunts, uncles and cousins to bouncy afternoon sled rides and goose dinners. The classic story, not quite a children's story so much as an ode to Christmas that readers of all ages can appreciate, has now been given new life in an illustrated book published by Islandport Press. The illustrations aren't just any illustrations, though — they are woodblock prints created by artist Blue Butterfield of Portland. The Bowdoin College graduate, who is a physician assistant at Maine Medical, learned about woodblock carving and printing while studying there. “There was a visiting history professor who gave a sort-of workshop on it named Tom Killian ... and I was very, very intrigued,” said Butterfield in a recent telephone interview. “I really fell in love with it and continued to do it over the next several decades.” For the last nine years, she has created the popular “A Year in Maine” calendar using her woodblock prints. She also has a line of greeting cards. And it was those greeting cards that led Islandport editor Genevieve Morgan to Butterfield with the idea to create this book. After reading the story, Butterfield agreed. *See Christmas, Page C2*

‘Wonderful’ tribute to a classic

BY JUDY HARRISON
BDN STAFF

The Bangor Opera House has been transformed into a broadcast studio complete with large microphones, a live band, jingles advertising local businesses, actors playing multiple roles and flashing “applause” signs that tell theatergoers when to put their hands together for Penobscot Theatre Company's holiday production. Not only is the show a delightful tribute to Frank Capra's 1946 film classic, “It's a Wonderful Life,” but it's a loving homage to live radio as well. By setting the show in a studio, playwright Joe Landry sets up a play within a play that allows more movement onstage and more direct interaction between the characters than if the story were presented as a radio play performed on a bare stage. The use of that theatrical device means “It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play” never becomes static or stogy. The ads for the show's sponsors are clever and funny and come at perfect moments in between tense scenes. Roderick Menzies of Los Angeles, who is making his PTC debut directing this show, easily could *See Review, Page C2*

THEATER
REVIEW

Seven holiday events to entertain your family



Renee Love (center) points out floats to Reece Geiser, 2, during the annual Bangor Festival of Lights Parade and tree lighting Saturday through downtown Bangor.

BY SHELBY HARTIN
BDN STAFF

Twinkling lights, frosty mornings and wet mittens laid out to dry on the radiator. Clear night skies with winking stars, a hot cup of cocoa and red noses. And, of course, holiday music and performances. It's not hard to find something to do during the chilly months leading up to the holidays. There's plenty for the family to enjoy this holiday season, from traditional performances such as “The Nutcracker,” to holiday feasts. We'll start with Bangor where holiday events are plenty. The Bangor Historical Society has decked out the Thomas A. Hill House for a series of events and “a glimpse into holidays past when

the Hill House is decorated in grand style.” Tea and treats will top off the holiday celebrations set to take place 1-4 p.m. Saturdays, Dec. 12 and 19. Holidays at Hill House admission is \$10 per person and \$5 for age 12 and under. Tickets can be purchased at the Bangor Historical Society's website. In Ellsworth, Christmas at Woodlawn will run until Dec. 23. The historic Black House has been decorated by more than 20 area businesses in festive finery. Its calendar of events includes tours of the Black House, holiday high teas at 3 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 16, and Fridays, Dec. 11 and 18, and a holiday feast 6-9 p.m. Dec. 16. The feast will feature a five-course meal of hors d'oeuvres, soup, salad, roast duck, plum pudding *See Family, Page C2*

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The Nutcracker

December 11+12, 7 PM and December 12+13, 2 PM
Waterville Opera House / www.operahouse.org

4th Annual POPUPSHOP

November 19 – December 19 / Common Street Arts Gallery
Visit www.commonstreetarts.org for hours
Over 30 artists and artisans featuring work from around New England

