

Obsessing on Santa?

Wood master Turk applies ample artistry, full bore, into new endeavor

By DAVID MOORE
The Arab Tribune

As an artist with timber and wood, a man who lives for the smell of sawdust, Gregg Turk built custom houses and offices, making dreams come true for grown-ups.

Having survived the pressures of owning a construction company and the toll of physical labor, as his 60th birthday approaches he's launching himself into a new effort, this time making dreams come true for children – and grown-ups, too.

Turk is becoming a Santa Claus.

And he's approaching it just as did building houses – cutting no corners, going full bore, his mind spinning at the speed of a circular saw.

"I want to give something back," he says from under his maroon toque, or Santa hat, with the white rabbit trim and the white whiskers of a real beard and ample mustache. "I'm trying to put the excitement back... not just for kids but for friends and lovers and spouses, the excitement that brings all of us back into this circle of being children.

"My mind gets going and sometimes it doesn't want to stop," he says with a ho-ho from the heart if not the belly. "My wife said I'm obsessing, but it's super positive stuff. Why not? I can."

Obsessing? The man who built a 16-foot clock tower – the seven-foot clock is yet to come – on the rolling grounds of the home where he and Reba Burden Turk live in Cotaco Valley? People ask him why he built it.

"Because I can," Turk beams.

Obsessing? Because he could, Turk graduated in May from the International University of Santa Claus with a "BSC," a bachelor's degree in, well, take a guess.

The four-day course in Hollywood covers topics from being photographed with kids and answering tough questions to the history of Santa and the magic in his suit – and there is magic there, Turk insists.

Obsessing? He didn't stop there.

Turk is a member of FORBS. Even while he apparently did quite well as a general contractor, it has nothing to do with Forbes financial magazine. It stands for the Fraternal Order of Real Bearded Santas. And though he does a little touchup on the beard and hair, most of it's naturally white.

Topping it all off, so to speak, he got Betty Holmes of Arab to custom sew his toque and the green vest that sets off his maroon pants and Santa coat.

Obsessing? Not Turk.

The first of October he plans to launch his website: www.SantaVisitsAlabama.com. It will explain all of his Santa services, which include making pre-Christmas visits

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Tribune photos by David Moore

Gregg Turk is building a grandfather clock on steroids on the grounds of his home in Cotaco Valley. It'll be 23 feet tall when the clock is added. Some of the history of his sprawling workshop, below, plays a part in the new directions the renowned contractor is taking.

