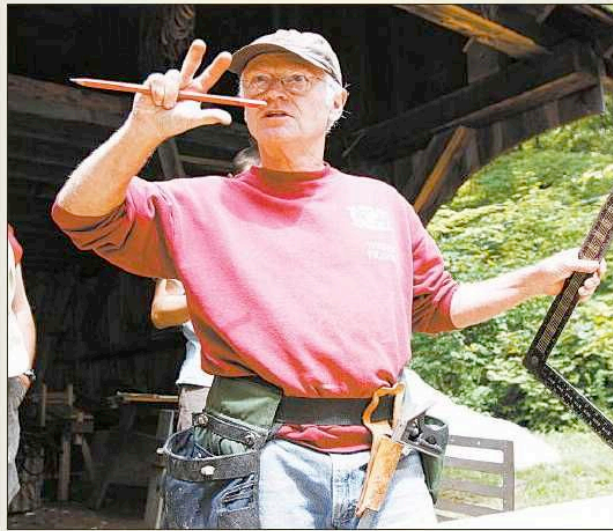
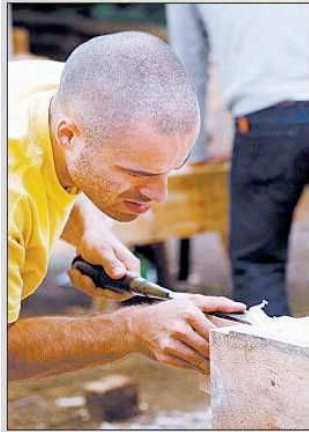


# HEWN BY HAND



Photos by Stephanie Zollstan / Berkshire Eagle Staff  
Will Beemer, above, director of the Heartwood School of Homebuilding and Woodworking, teaches a class on timber framing at the school in Washington. In photo at upper left, Adam Kellerson chisels the fitted end of a timber for a building foundation. At bottom left, Bob Besaha (center) holds a wedge dovetail joint for Beemer. At bottom right, Amanda Kellerson chisels the fitted end of a timber; at right, instructor Dave Carlson marks a board; at top right, Carl Ford manually drills a foundation timber.



## Heartwood School teaches homebuilding skills

By Charles Bonenti  
Berkshire Eagle Staff

WASHINGTON  
The back-to-the-land movement that germinated in the 1960s, was in full maturity in 1978 when Elias Velonis established the Heartwood School for Homebuilding Crafts on land his New Jersey family owned on Johnson Hill Road here.

Originally intended to teach people how to build their own houses with quality materials and craftsmanship, its program has diversified over the last decade in response to changing real estate forces.

"It's become harder to build your own house these days, because of land prices, but also because of more restrictive

building codes," says Will Beemer, who now directs the school with his wife, Michele.

The came to Heartwood in 1980 to work as apprentices, then took over in 1985, when Velonis moved on to other woodworking endeavors.

"The simple cabin in the woods is not as attractive to many people," said Beemer. "So while our homebuilding course is still popular, we've also expanded our curriculum to woodworking and timber framing for those who want to focus on one specialty.

One week last month, when these photos were taken, 21 students were at Heartwood for a timber-framing class.

About half of them are professional builders and the others are woodworkers or owner-builders," Beemer said. "In

our homebuilding course there are about equal numbers of men and women, and I think the motivation for most of them now is to renovate or add on as opposed to building an entirely new house. We used to get three or four home-builders a year," he said. "Now we have just one."

Classes, offered from mid-April through October, are taught by professional builders and woodworkers, who rotate through as the syllabus requires. Two or three, for example, step in at different times teach different skills to the timber-framing class.

Besides house-building, classes are also offered in furniture-making and cabinetry, concrete countertop construction

HEARTWOOD, continued on E3

## Looking for quality building

### HEARTWOOD from E1

tion, green building design, converting trees to timber, use of natural materials and other related subjects.

Beemer, who has been designing and building houses for 40 years, has taught his subjects on several university campuses and served as a co-executive director for 11 years of the Timber Framers Guild. Michele Beemer manages the office and is also an on-site instructor,

While most students come from outside Berkshire County, Beemer said the cost of airfares and lodging has been deterring some regulars, so Heartwood has been looking to build up its local clientele.

Most people who take Heart-

wood's courses are looking less to save money, Beemer said, than to acquire the skills to know and to build with quality materials. It may take them far longer to complete a project than would a commercial contractor, but they will have more control over it and know exactly what went into it.

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**What's happening around town?** *Community Notes are an important part of The Eagle. Read them – and also let us know what is happening.*