

# Behind the Scenes with Kurt Hertzog



## The Beall Tool Company

There probably are very few woodworkers or woodturners who haven't heard of J. R. Beall, owner of *The Beall Tool Company* ([www.bealltool.com](http://www.bealltool.com)). Jerry (or J.R.) owns a small, family-run business in Newark, Ohio; the small is by design, because Jerry wants it that way. In the past, he's had a gaggle of employees, but life is much simpler now with Jerry, his wife, and a few part-timers that flesh out the workforce.

You can easily pass by the place because it is set back from the road in a nicely wooded area on a quiet country road. Since there is really no walk-in business, the driveway and parking spaces are for the UPS man and the few workers.

Entering the building, the first stop is the front lobby with the printers and faxes, as well as Jerry's assembly table for the latest version of the Pen Wizard. The Wizard is now in its third generation, and Jerry seems content that he has gotten it pretty much whipped. The self-taught woodworker, woodturner, luthier (maker of stringed musical instruments), wooden clockmaker, kaleidoscope maker, and more, started out at the test bench at AT&T. J.R. went there after his service in the Navy and spent fifteen years on the bench. Though an English major, he began to make musical instruments. Along the way, he founded the Guild of American Luthiers and built somewhere in the neighborhood of 600 instruments.

A self-professed "short-attention-span individual," Jerry tired of musical instruments and moved on to wooden clocks. He and the production staff, having grown to seven, began building clocks and marketing them at craft shows. J.R. saw the need for wooden nuts and bolts, so he developed a threading system. His thread box uses a router and was awarded a patent. Jerry's products are often something he has seen the need for while he is in the shop. His "why isn't there a tool to make this easier?" attitude drives the developmental items at *Beall Tool*.

The wear and tear of the craft show circuit prompted Jerry to get out of the rat race and stay closer to home. One of the items he had noticed was the buffing system that pipe makers use to buff their pipes. J.R. took the idea and adapted it to the woodworking and woodturning markets, and it has been a huge success. It is common practice now to use "Beall buffed" as a verb for your finish.

Quite an honor!

Jerry sees many things in the machine tool and metal-working arena as ideas for adaptation to the wood markets. His collet chuck is a good example—a metal-working idea adapted for the benefit of the woodworker. Jerry had an interest in ornamental turning (note the Holtzapffel book on his shelf in **Fig. 9**), and has gone through two iterations before arriving at the third and the one he likes the most.

Along the way in the last forty years or so, J.R. has worked on boats, furniture, kaleidoscopes, clocks, musical instruments, and ornamental lathes. Everything is done in-house. Jerry writes the catalog copy, his wife Judith provides the photographs, his daughter works on the website, and the videos for YouTube are shot out back in the shop.

Where is Jerry going next? He has been thinking about a wooden clock kit or perhaps a book on wooden clocks. He has been working on new clock escapements and has done some work on trains. There are more YouTube videos in his future, and the one show he still does each year is the Woodcraft vendor show. Will he retire? At seventy-six years young, Jerry is in the shop every day and doesn't see an end in sight.



**Fig. 1.** Because there is no walk-in trade, it is easy to drive by *The Beall Tool Company* in Newark, Ohio.



**Fig. 2.** What started as a small outbuilding has grown over the years as Jerry and Judith Beall have established the company.



**Fig. 5.** Not only does the shop have the basic tools and supplies, it also has some of the most modern computer-controlled equipment.



**Fig. 3.** The building is a web of interconnected rooms that include a wood shop, metal shop, shipping area, office area, and Jerry's office. It has a cozy feel as you pass through it.



**Fig. 6.** The product shipping area is a small room containing the products that *Beall* offers, plus the necessary packing materials. They sell to both individuals and businesses, and shipping is done daily.



**Fig. 4.** Jerry's playground is in an added section to the building. It is a fully equipped wood and metal shop where he works on product development.



**Fig. 7.** If you order the latest product, the *Beall Pen Wizard*, you'll get a hand-assembled unit that is put together by none other than Jerry himself.



**Fig. 8.** Even Jerry's office is a work area. He has a variety of past and future items lying about.



**Fig. 9.** Seventy-six years young, Jerry is at work every day. Note that Holtzapffel and Petroski have a prominent position on Jerry's bookshelf.



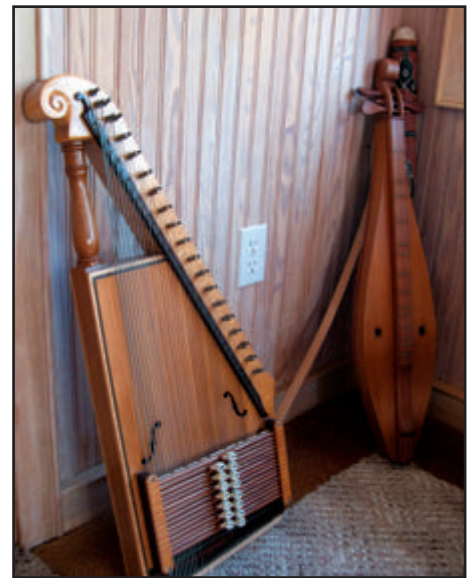
**Fig. 11.** He has a lighter side as well.



**Fig. 12.** Widgets, turnings, miniatures, black powder replicas, clocks, and musical instruments adorn Jerry's home.



**Fig. 10.** Jerry is not only an accomplished woodturner and woodworker, but also has a love for wooden clocks.



**Fig. 13.** To think of Jerry Beall only for his threading tools, buffing products, and other *Beall* products is to only see a small part of a talented designer and woodworker.