



DEAN PALMER, SPECIAL TO THE MERCURY

Guelph potter Jessica Steinhauser works on a kachelofen — wood-burning ovens made of clay that can be used for cooking and heating — at her Woolwich Street studio.

Kachelofen concept heating up

Local potter revives dream of making decorative wood-burning clay ovens

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GUELPH — In a strange twist of irony, and after a heaping helping of Murphy's Law, Jessica Steinhauser's 20-year-old idea is finally getting some traction.

Once she cooled off pitching her kachelofens about a year ago — a process that has required more public education, changes to municipal building codes, seeking out an oven builder, and constructing prototypes than she ever anticipated — the idea seems to be heating up on its own.

Steinhauser, a potter, makes kachelofens — wood-burning ovens made of clay that burn so efficiently, four logs will heat a house for 12 hours.

And after showing her creation at ArtPrize, an international art competition in Grand Rapids, Mich., at the end of this month, Steinhauser is bracing for orders. She wouldn't mind winning the \$250,000 first prize either.

It's not that she's ahead of her time. The idea she's been peddling since she finished her apprenticeship in Germany decades ago, is actually kind of ancient. A contest in Germany in 1763 yielded the efficient engineering design Steinhauser favours.

"I know, right," Steinhauser said with incredulity during an interview at her Woolwich Street studio.

"Why hasn't this caught on before now? I don't understand it either."

Kachelofens are popular in Germany and eastern European countries because they take very little wood. Firewood is a scarce

commodity in that part of the world, Steinhauser said.

Heat is stored in the mass of the oven and radiates into the home. The surfaces are never too hot to touch and benches are often included in designs.

"It's all about physics. The clay has the ability to hold the heat and the small fire chamber takes the least amount of wood for optimum combustion," she said.

In Steinhauser's hands, the ovens are also works of art. Her *Haliburton Highlands* kachelofen is made of large clay tiles with different designs in each square — lines of poetry, simple outlines of trees, wind, and snowflakes — giving the oven a patchwork quilt treatment.

This is the prototype she will exhibit at the Open Concept Gallery in Grand Rapids during ArtPrize, an international art exhibit where the public votes for the winner.

But last summer she installed her first working kachelofen, in the heritage home of Ward 2 Councillor Ian Findlay.

"It took time for approvals from the building department," Findlay said.

"I had to hire a third-party consultant to verify it is all it claims to be. There were meetings with insurance people, the fire department and the building department. It was quite a process.

"But no, I have no regrets. It's ancient technology, it's environmental, it's sustainable and it's a wonderful feature of the home. You load it in the morning and it gives a nice heat that lasts all day. And it's a beautiful work of art."

The cost of building prototypes but not selling any, and



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Jessica Steinhauser finished a product, called a kachelofen that burns so efficiently it takes only four logs to heat a house for 12 hours.

printing informational material but not selling any, was too much for Steinhauser, who decided last winter to give up on selling the ovens and return to making coffee mugs — the bread and butter of any pottery business.

Then she received three grants from the Ontario Arts Council, then an order from a homeowner in Toronto for three.

And then the art exhibit in the U.S. that will boost her audience and potential market.

"I had decided to stop. I had to let it go, give up on the idea, and that was hard. But then all these good things started to happen and I thought, well, maybe it's not over yet," she said.

For more information, visit stonehousepottery.com.

Upgrade to make library easier to use

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GUELPH — The Guelph Public Library will aim to make life easier for its staff and library users later this month when it performs a \$100,000 software upgrade.

The upgrade is scheduled for Sept. 23. All library branches will close at 5 p.m. that day.

The change will make the library's online catalogue easier to navigate and offer users new features, said Colleen Lipp, the library's manager of circulation services. She added it would accommodate increased use and lighten the load on employees.

Once the new program is installed, users will be able to select their favourite authors and receive notification when new items by those authors come in. They will also be able to keep a history of books they previously checked out and returned.

"That's something we've had people request quite often."

The switch will also enable the library to notify users of requested books becoming available through email or with an automated phone call. With the old system, library staff had to call people to let them know when books are ready for pickup. With about 199,000 requests made last year, the new program will make the request-notification process easier, Lipp said. Reminder emails will also be sent to people two days before borrowed items are due.

Virginia Gillham, chair of Friends of the Guelph Public Library, said the new look should be especially beneficial to people who have little experience using a computer. "The whole idea is to make it user-friendly."

She and Lipp agreed the change is necessary to accommodate increasing use of the library. Last year, the library had 1.7 million books checked out and a new branch is expected to open in November on the city's east side.

Choppers drop rabies vaccine for skunks

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GUELPH — Helicopters will fly over the Guelph-area this fall, sprinkling four-grain pellets to inoculate skunks against rabies.

From Sept. 14 to Sept. 22, the Ministry of Natural Resources will release 1.3 million pellets rabies vaccine within southwestern Ontario, in an area that stretches from King City to the western border of Lake Huron and as far north as Collingwood to the southern point of Aylmer.

The baits, made of fat and wax, are flavoured to taste like icing sugar and vanilla.

Rabies attacks the central nervous system and is fatal if left untreated.

It can also be quite costly for someone to get vaccinated when they come in contact with a rabid animal, he said.

The province's vaccine bait program has been in place since 1989, however southwestern Ontario is where the last concentration of rabies exists, Bachmann said.

Much of the focus will be to remove the fox rabies strain in skunks, he said. The baiting program was successful in eliminating rabies within foxes, across southern Ontario, Bachmann said.

Ministry personnel are asking the public to leave the bait undisturbed, should people come across it in the wild.

If pets bring the bait to the house, it should be thrown in the garbage or the bush. A telephone number for enquiries and the words "do not eat" appear on the bait.

Guelph health unit reports H1N1 flu case

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GUELPH — Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health on Wednesday reported one recent case of the H1N1 flu locally.

The health unit's manager of communicable diseases, Janice Walters, said there was one confirmed case of the so-called swine flu in a Guelph man last week, though no more have been discovered this week.

"(He's) recovered now, but had been hospitalized," Walters said of the infected Guelphite. She added he had been out of the city

when he became ill, but couldn't say more.

The contagious, sometimes deadly H1N1 influenza virus made headlines in the spring when it infected thousands of people in Mexico and the U.S., subsequently spreading to dozens of other countries.

Walters noted her health unit intends to immunize the public against seasonal and H1N1 strains this fall. Details about vaccination clinics will be forthcoming soon.

H1N1 hasn't disappeared since the spring outbreak.

"We still are having what we

call sporadic cases," Walters said, citing last week's incident as the latest example.

"I don't think people should be surprised."

The World Health Organization declared it a pandemic this past spring.

"We've been seeing cases ever since."

The local health unit has kept a close eye on the situation in Guelph and surrounding area, particularly cases in which people need to be hospitalized.

It also passes this information on to the provincial Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care,

which is monitoring cases around the province.

One intriguing aspect is whether the pathogen is changing its characteristics — mutating — over time, which might require a different response from health care workers.

"So far, the virus has not changed that much," Walters observed.

There's always the fear of it becoming an even more dangerous threat to public health, she said.

This fall, people will require immunization shots against both seasonal influenza and the H1N1 strain, she advised.