

Now that's a Christmas scene worth a second look

By NANCY ENRIGHT

With so many factory-made Christmas trees and mass-produced snowmen in Mississauga, David Bell's homemade display of Santa and his lifelike reindeer is a refreshing novelty.

The reindeer on Bell's lawn at 2503 Mainroyal St. in Erin Mills, are balanced on top of one another, lifting Santa's bundle of goodies to the rooftop. Santa hangs over the edge of the roof reaching for his sack.

Although not noticeable from road distance, one reindeer sports a disgusted "Let's-get-this-over-with" look as he sprawls lazily out in front of his more industrious companions.

It took Bell about five days to transform the four-by-eight-foot sheet of plywood into the Christmas display.

"I enjoyed doing it so much that I made four others for relatives," Bell says. "They didn't take as long to complete."

The other displays include a group of young carollers, a large Santa Claus, and "freeway Santa." The Freeway Santa, decorating the lawn of a sister's home, shows Santa in a sleigh accident, gifts crushed, reindeer and Santa peering out from beneath the playful rubble.

"Just as I changed the design in most of the patterns, in this one I added my sister's kids' names to the

presents to give it a personal touch," Bell explains. Yet another Bell creation features a puzzled Santa on the lawn looking for his reindeer which are hiding inside the front window.

Bell, a quality-control inspector for Polyainers, spends much of his spare time at the workbench.

"I've always liked building things. Since we moved here, I've built a picnic table, tool shed, and a doghouse, designed as a miniature of our house model."

The idea of building his own Christmas display came to Bell late this summer when he decided he wanted to add color to the house, but not in plastic or artificial form.

"I called the Toronto Star and they sent me some patterns, but I found the most detailed ones in Mechanics Illustrated and Popular Mechanics."

"I photocopied them at the library, enlarged them at home, making some changes in the features."

Bell maintains it takes little artistic ability to create the displays and adds, "There are very few mistakes you can make."

"Although you have to enlarge the pattern by eye, it's not that difficult if you divide the sheet of plywood into six-by-six-inch squares doing one square at a time."

It takes about one day to trace out the pattern,

according to Bell, but only 20 minutes to cut it out from the quarter-inch plywood with any ordinary jigsaw.

"Then you put a frame on the back and begin painting. It's important to start with a base coat of white—any cheap brand will do—before you paint in the features with colored paint, starting with the lightest first to allow for any errors."

While most displays can be done in black, white and red paint, Bell wanted more subtle shading, so he added brown and mixed white and red for the flesh tone of Santa's face.

The painting process was completed in four one-hour sessions with Bell adding his own humorous facial expressions to the characters.

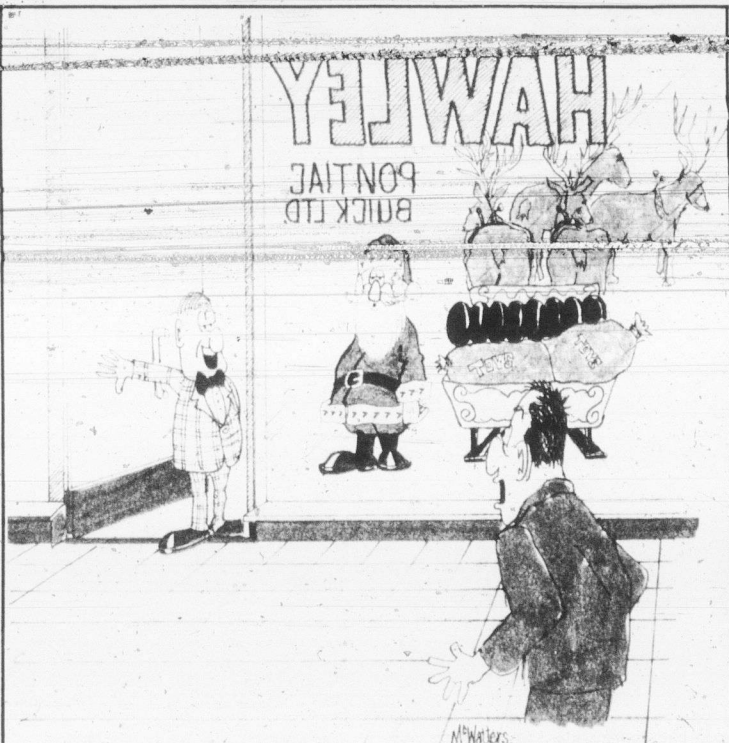
The crowning touch to Bell's work of art is a chimney he built and painted, fastening it to the top of the slanted roof, with a spotlight focussed on Santa's ultimate destination.

Bell figures materials for the project, including plywood, paint, strapping, hinges and nails, cost about \$30.

"I'd be interested in doing displays for other people, but I don't know what price tag I'd put on labor. My wife Janet can attest to the hours I spent buried in my workshop, but she really helped, looking after the house and our new baby girl Heather while I worked."

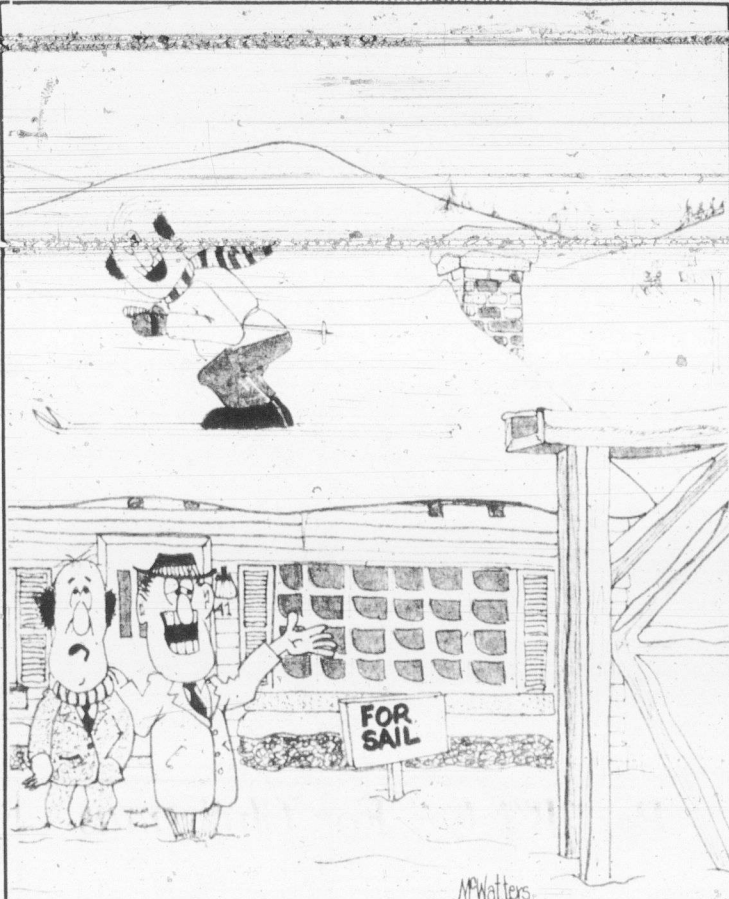


David and Janet Bell, along with daughter, Heather, survey Santa's progress on the roof of their Mainroyal St. home. Bell made the display from plywood, adding humorous touch to the facial expressions of Santa's helpers.



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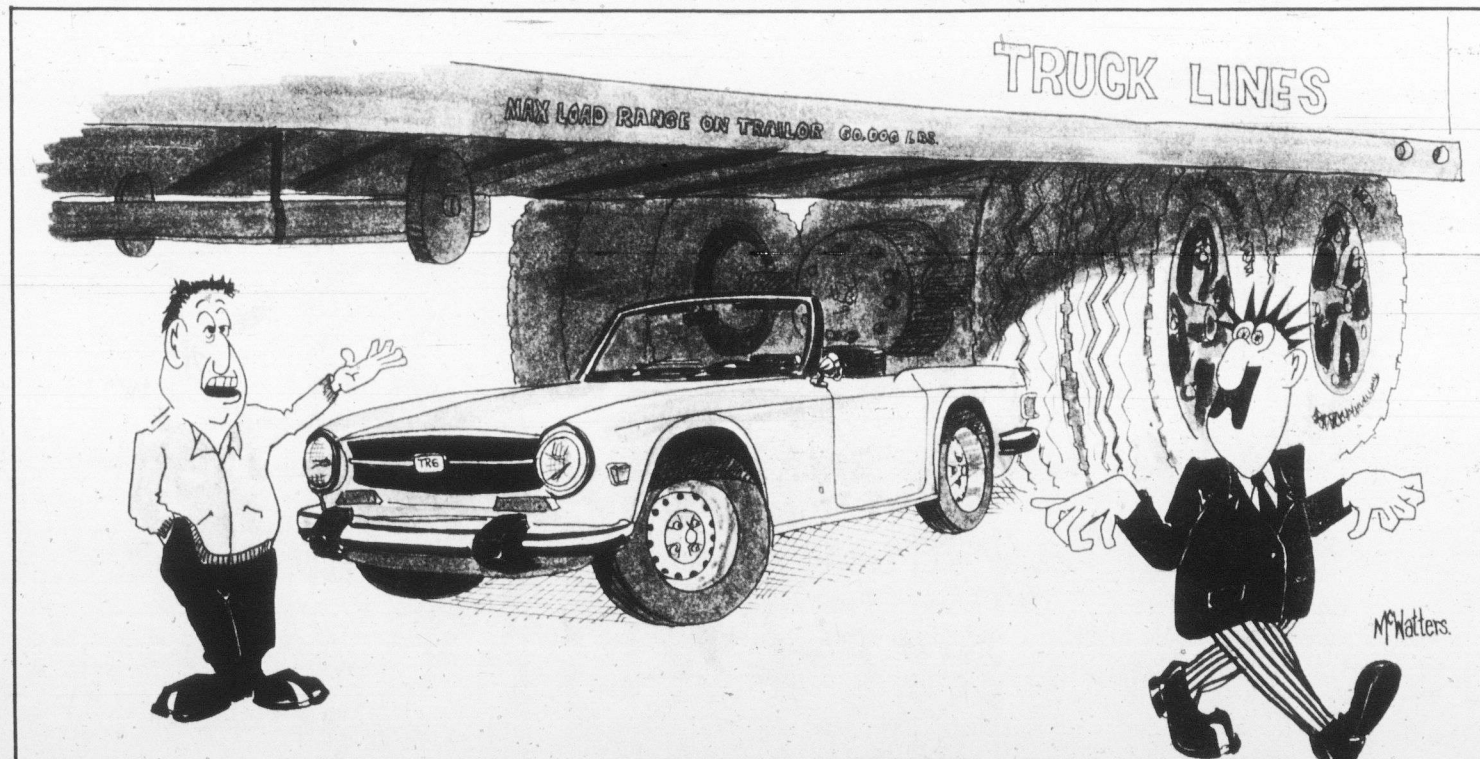
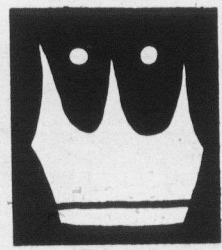
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