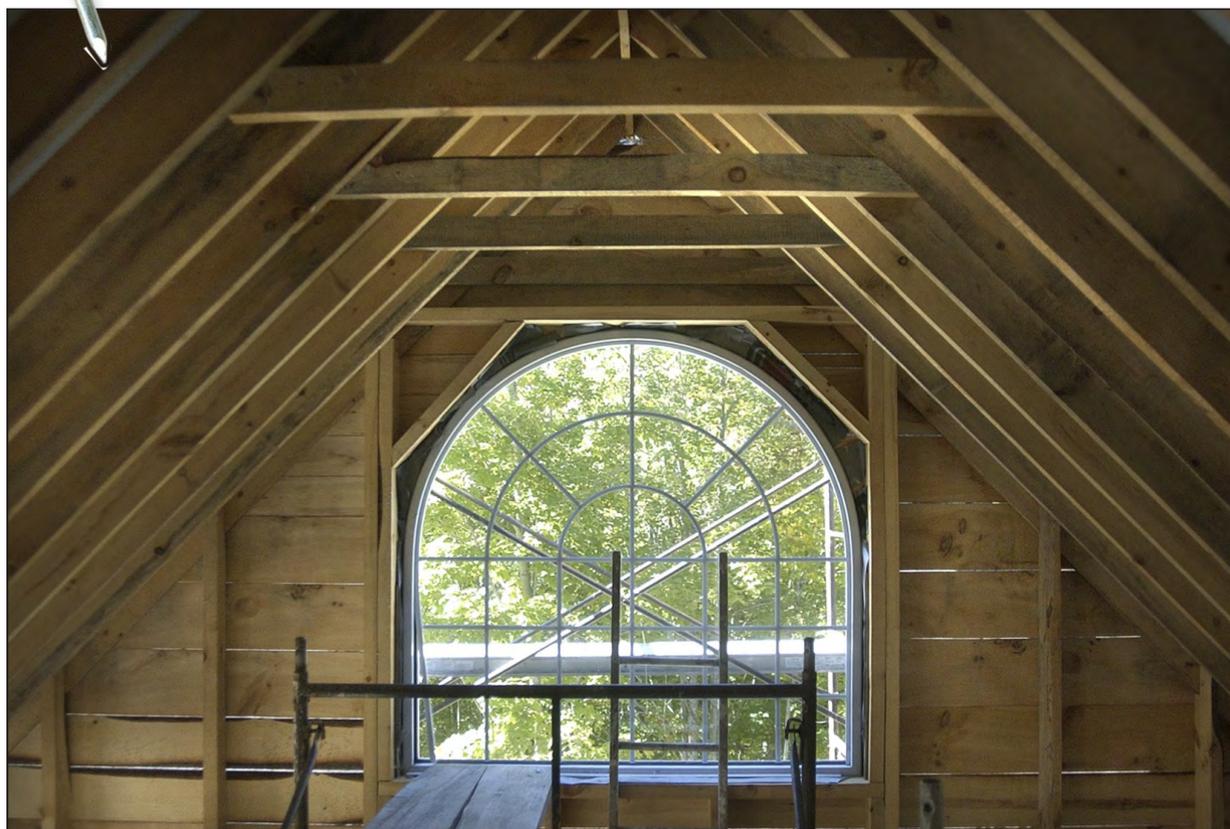


LIVING

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2002

Sun Journal

SECTION E



It took four people to install this 200-pound window in the second-floor loft.

LAURA SEGALL/SUN JOURNAL



VOICES OF MAINE
Karen Scalton Carlton

Empty nesters aren't so alone

The last of the children has left home, much to the dismay of the pets.

Our youngest daughter, Shannon, moved into her own place at the start of summer, leaving us alone. Even though we knew we would miss her, we can't say we weren't looking forward to peaceful, even romantic evenings that included no one but the two of us. I pictured candlelight dinners complete with mood music or snuggling on the couch with a bowl of popcorn and a movie in the VCR.

Unfortunately, there was something we didn't consider. We didn't think about where the household animals would fit into the equation. Shannon, the Pied Piper of Pets, is no longer available to water, feed, snuggle, hold, play, walk and to give baths. She can't even have the crew over to visit at her

Shannon, the Pied Piper of Pets, is no longer available to water, feed, snuggle, hold, play, walk and to give baths.

apartment without getting into hot water with her landlord.

Let's just say I had no idea Bosco, our 11-year-old cocker spaniel who thinks he's still a puppy; our plump kitty, Pouncer, who is rather skittish; and CJ, the black cat with the attitude of a teenager who's had the phone and CD player taken away, could be so high maintenance. And to compound the situation, they're all missing their Shannon. Oh, they're adjusting, although CJ speaks out regarding her dissatisfaction by taking every opportunity to swat one of us when we unsuspectingly turn a corner.

So much for romance

So those candlelight dinners and romantic evenings have pretty much given way to spending quality time with our needy pets, who are just like small, very spoiled children, only furrier.

When we come home from work, we're greeted by the three of them, barking and meowing in unison, letting us know they've had a long, boring day. Even though they are fed before I start supper, they're underfoot anyway, hopping I'll drop something, like a 20-ounce steak or a salmon filet.

While we eat our evening meal, Bosco, with constant reminders, sits on the kitchen rug. The cats are another story. CJ, who is far beyond cheeky, blithely leaps into our laps and would certainly paw through our dinner plates looking for the tenderest of tidbits, if we allowed it, which we don't most of the time. Unfortunately, Pouncer is learning her friend's bad habits and has taken to standing on her hind legs,

SEE EMPTY PAGE E2

Homeward bound

For three years, Rich Lajoie has been building his dream house. So far, he's sawed about 40,000 feet of lumber and clocked roughly 4,680 manhours.

BY SETH GOLDEN
Special to the Sun Journal

Rich Lajoie knows just how much willpower it takes to build a house with his bare hands. He's been doing it for three years now. Although he says that "way back" most everyone would have done it just that way in this country, he also thinks about how long it took to create some much earlier structures.

"Those pyramids took a long time to build," he said, his breath visible on a recent chilly day. "And it's kind of like that."

But Lajoie knows that he's "a finisher," someone who's able to see things through to the end.

And that end, although in sight, remains somewhere off in the future - about three years more, the

With herculean-sized hope, Lajoie has worked on this labor of love on weekends, on days off from work and on many nights, using a 1,000-watt light on a stand so he can see his progress.

35-year-old Lajoie estimates -- after week after week of logging about 30 hours a week on the project without any contractors.

His project began three years ago in 1999 when Lajoie acquired about five acres in North Turner on Torrey Hill.

In a nearby field, Lajoie found an abandoned bulldozer, circa early 1960s. Lajoie asked its owners if he could use the dozer for awhile if he got it going and returned it to them in working condition.

They agreed to the deal.

Lajoie and Andy, his brother, managed to bring the bulldozer back to life.

"We drove it up through the woods two miles to the lot here," Lajoie said. "(I) just basically bulldozed my way through the woods



onto the lot and parked it right in the middle. Then I started cutting a clear area."

With herculean-sized hope ever since, Lajoie has worked on this labor of love on weekends, on days off from work and on many nights, using a 1,000-watt light on a stand so he can see his progress.

In fact, "most of this (got built) at night," Lajoie notes. He estimates that he's clocked approximately 4,680 man-hours on the project thus far.

With his 1998 band sawmill, Lajoie has so far sawed approximately 40,000 feet of lumber for his house. Sometimes, like a sculptor determined to realize his vision, he's worked for hours each night using this lumber, well past midnight.

In a way, he's somewhat like a person who dreams of hiking the entire Appalachian Trail, who eventually understands only as he walks it how much of a task it's going to be to cover the entire distance from Katahdin to Springer Mountain in Georgia. Yet somehow manages to accomplish all 2,168 miles anyway. That kind of fortitude and patience are built-in, as it were, to his own task.

"This takes unheard of patience," he said. "I can't actually look too far ahead, because it gets discouraging. I have to concentrate on what I'm doing today."

Living in the present moment like this has gotten Lajoie about "halfway there."

In approximately a year, he expects he'll be able to move in. His home has already taken shape.

Indomitable like Lajoie's will, the enclosed house rises relentlessly, soaring 36-feet skyward from the cellar.

It peaks at a steep-pitched roof, giving it a distinct and distinguished look.

SEE HOUSE PAGE E2

Top left: Rich Lajoie co-owns a sawmill he is using to mill all the wood for his house. **Bottom left:** His inspiration for the original design came from a picture on a paint can.