

# HERALD-WHIG

## Father, son take on-the-road shop to Salem Church to repair handbells



Mark Bond, near, and his son Aaron of Kerrville, Tx. clean more than 60 hand bells Tuesday in a small trailer set up outside of Salem Evangelical United Church of Christ. Oxidation need to be cleaned off of the bell before corrosion occurs which may change the pitch of the bell. The bells are dismantled and attached to an electric motor which turns at a high rate of speed. | H-W Photo/Michael Kipley

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**By Deborah Gertz Husar** Herald-Whig

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QUINCY -- Mark and Aaron Bond spend much of the day sidestepping each other all with the goal of making beautiful music.

"It's tight quarters in here," Aaron said. "We're in each other's way all day long."

Father and son work in tandem to service and repair handbells as The Bellman, what Mark believes is the only company in the United States that services all brands of handbells, both American and European, on a full-time basis and the only ones with a brick-and-mortar facility along with on-the-road service.

The Bonds brought their mobell shop to Quincy on Tuesday to work on the five octaves of Schulmerich handbells at Salem Evangelical United Church of Christ.

An annual circuit takes them to 46 states -- all but Alaska, Hawaii, Montana and Wyoming -- over four trips covering about a dozen states at a time. This trek took them to New Hampshire, Connecticut, upstate New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois and Missouri before heading back home to Texas in time for Thanksgiving.

At each stop, they spend a day or more working on handbells in settings from small rural churches to urban universities.

The process, Salem bell choir director Jeannie Kanauss said, makes the bells not only look beautiful but sound beautiful.

"It gets rid of a lot of squeaks, squawks and just wear and tear from over the years because bells have a lot of moving parts in them that need to be updated, replaced and just taken care of," she said.

"The first thing we do is disassemble the bells. We inspect all of the components on the interior of the bells, repair or replace parts as necessary," Mark said. "Depending on the brand, there's 25 to 30 separate components in every bell, many of which are friction-bearing parts which are subject to wear and tear each time the bell rings."

Components are adjusted and, when needed, replaced, and while the bells are disassembled, the Bonds also machine clean and polish the castings, or metal parts of the bells, inside and out. Against a steady hum from the machines, father and son use a chemical cleaner, abrasive polish, paste polish and dry abrasives on each bell.

"If a bell cleans up really nice the first time through the process, we're done. If it's still tarnished or has water spots left, we go through that a second time. For really, really bad bells, sometimes it takes three applications," Mark said.

Cleaning the bells is the most time-consuming part of their work, "but probably the most surprising thing is that the bells play easier and sound better when we're done working on them," Mark said.

Mark got his start in instrument repair while teaching junior high band in Michigan. He left teaching to work in Texas in sales, then a new job opportunity in sales put him to work for a handbell manufacturer.

Recognizing the demand for bell service and repair, he started offering the service part time, then he got so busy with service and repair that he gave up the sales job for the business run by him and his wife Linda. Aaron, who had a corporate career, worked part time with his dad for a decade and recently joined him full time in work that carries its own rewards.

Hurricane Harvey destroyed a church in Port Aransas, Texas, and the only thing salvaged was the congregation's handbells.

"A neighboring church hired us to try to restore them. When we do stuff like that we kind of feel like we're part of something," Aaron said. "It's kind of fun working on an old instrument that's worth saving."

They balance time on the road with time back home in Texas, where Aaron has three young children. "We get home, and we're always amazed how big our houses are," Aaron said.

"When you spend all day in here and evenings in a hotel room, you get home and a two- or three-bedroom house seems enormous," Mark said.