

Merry Christmas to ALL! - (Christmas 2004 Newsletter.)

Well, I guess you have been wondering what I have been up to since last **Christmas**.

I work everyday around the house trying to get things in shape and make room for more storage. Although I finished my garage office last year I didn't have any pictures of it after it was completed. So I guess that is where I will start with what I've been up to.

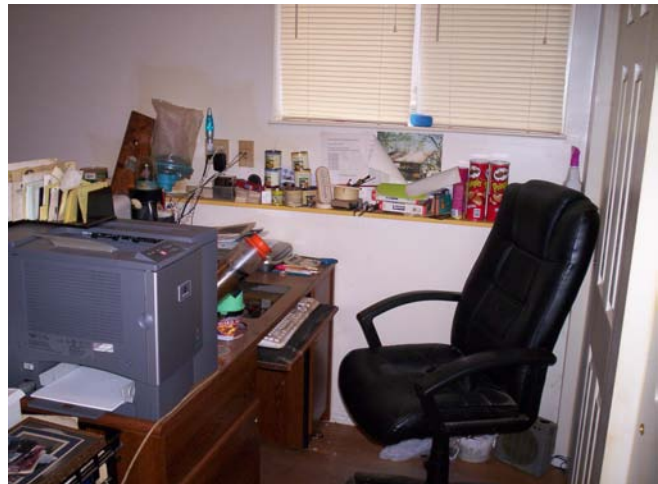


This is a view taken from the northwest corner of the garage looking toward the southeast corner where my office was built. The first door is a linen closet and opens into what could eventually be a hallway. The larger door past it opens inward to the office. It is in a direct line from the mandoor from the inside to outside the garage, so it is a straight shot from outside into my office. The red and black items affixed to the bucket in the foreground are my backup automatic bottle fillers.

Upon entering my office you see my very cluttered desk. Behind my chair are two 4 foot wide closets. The room looks like a standard master bedroom.

The yellow shelf runs the entire length of the two external walls, which are concrete block up to this point and simple stud construction above that. The shelf has come in very handy.

The gray box in the foreground is a Konica/Minolta color laser printer.



The picture to the left was taken from the doorway also and to the left of my desk. I was just finished cleaning off Debi's desk in order to pile it back up again with STUFF. So there is junk laying all around the place. As you can see, all the comforts of home, a nice ceiling fan, air conditioning and I'm still heating from that old baseboard heater I've had for umpteen zillion years.

We intend installing a bathroom and a second office and bottling area so the main heating/cooling system will come after that.

These views are taken of the southeast corner of the room from behind my desk. As you can see they represent my usual mess and clutter.



And finally, a view from the previous corner toward my desk area.

I spend most of my mornings in this room answering e-mails from my customers and just piddling around.



One of my major projects that took place this summer was tearing off the two old layers of shingles from the garage roof and installing a new set of shingles. As always, it often gets into slightly more than originally planned. I removed all the fascia and soffit as well as an old aluminum awning that was over the garage door, and extended the roof in place of the awning. This will be visible in another picture later where I show my work on the driveway.

Previously accomplished but never pictured was the excavation by hand and installation of two metal storage sheds behind the garage.

But this summer, I have cleared the back of lot number 1 and the front 2/3 of lot number 2 of wild overgrowth leaving the woods intact in the back 1/3 of lot number 2. Terraced the hedge row along the east property line. Installed a fence to keep the hounds in the now large backyard. And have cleared the woods on the west side of the garage, excavated by hand and installed a cedar retaining wall in preparation of installing a driveway, which is currently in progress.

Remember that little Beagle puppy we got last November?

Well, she's not a puppy anymore, hi hi.....



Before I get to some of the work I have managed to get accomplished so far, I thought it would be interesting to show some original photographs representative of the areas of progress.



Much cleanup, trimming, repairs and landscaping have taken place since these photographs were taken. The lower right photograph with Debi in it is an older photograph, since that photo was taken, the area behind the garage had grown up with wild poplar and mimosa trees and brush that had to be removed before excavation could take place for the storage sheds.

Note how steep the incline is behind the garage.

The front lot slopes about 15 inches of rise per 20 feet, but the back lot slopes about 30 inches of rise per only 10 feet. So it is quite steep back there.

The garage and house are only about 25 feet apart, yet the floor of the garage is over 3 feet above the floor of the house, and it was excavated such that 4 feet of the back of the garage is underground. The yellow shelf in the office by my desk is only 8 inches above the grade line in the back of the garage.

I do not have any during construction photographs of my storage sheds. The land was excavated by hand and the storage sheds built between my many trips back and forth to St. Louis while in the process of moving down here. Also, at the time they were erected, we figured they would only be temporary. Nonetheless, great pains were taken to insure they were located with possible future expansion in mind and in balance with the garage perimeters.

The clay and rock that I hand excavated from the storage shed area was used to reclaim about 6 feet of the front yard that had over the years eroded into the drainage ditch in front of the house. I have no before pictures of this ditch, suffice it to say that part of the roadway was undermined also and this is where I packed most of the rocks that were excavated. Once that project was completed, the ditch was seeded with new grass seed. It looked pretty nice too I might add!



Just to give you an idea of how steep our land is, I took this photograph from inside the new fence. The lay of the land is similar to the large hills you see in the distant background.

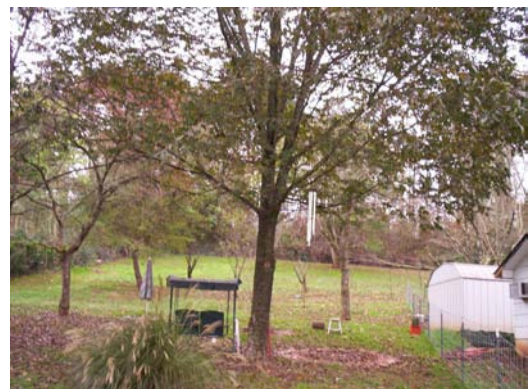
Our back property line is at the top of one of these large hills about another 100 feet behind me. Roughly the same elevation as the one you see in the distance.

At least we are high and dry, hi hi....

The photo to the right was taken standing in roughly the same spot as the original photo way above looking this way with the birdbath in the center.

I kept all the good trees and only removed the wild Mimosa's and other wild trees and bushes. Most of the new grass seed is finally sprouting.

As you can see, were at the top of the hill.



This is a picture looking southeast behind the garage where I placed the storage sheds. Despite the junk laying in the walkway from working on the roof, it does look pretty good back there.

Notice both the ramp and the steps up to the storage shed area. The same type finish will be applied to the walkways on either side of the garage. Ramp on the west side of the garage, steps on the east side of the garage.

Landscaping includes 4 evergreens (one visible), Ajuga at garage back and shed sides and Ivy at walk.



This view is looking west behind the garage. Not well defined in this photograph are the wood borders that line the walkways. The top of the cedar retaining wall in the background is how high the ground was before I began excavating for a driveway and parking area for my utility trailer. In the process the ramp walkway on the west side of the garage has been torn up temporarily. The two tiers of the retaining wall will be planted with both everbearing and June bearing strawberries. The far side is planted with Annual Lantana Bushes.

This photo gives a better view of the old ramp walkway and how the storage sheds are lined up with the garage. The purpose for staying so far away from the neighbors fence is that his fence runs as a taper inside of his property line to avoid two trees that are behind mine that is visible. The board to the right is only 6 inches inside of my property line at the top by the large tree. It will look even better when it's all done next year.



If you refer to the original picture of the driveway way above with Delbert (Deb) now deceased in the photo, it shows how the driveway looked when I first moved down here. Since then I have been using weed killer to clean it up a tad. I included this photo here because the ledger lines for the new driveway are barely visible. The house and fence are NOT parallel to each other. The left ledger line is parallel with the house for reference.

The picture to the right shows the trim edges in place for the driveway. In some places these edge pieces are over 1 foot off the ground. It's hard to see this in the photograph because of all the backfilling already accomplished. The higher elevation grassy areas on the right will be excavated down to level with the top of the edging and the dirt used to fill in the low grassy areas on the left.



The left photo gives some idea of how far below the edging some areas of the driveway really are.

I hate to seem redundant by including yet another photo of the driveway, but I wanted to add that this is only the base layer being installed in these photos.

The purpose of having the edging so high in some places is so that we can obtain some partially level areas where folks, especially Maw, can more easily get into and out of the car.

A fairly level area was designed at the front walk, the back walk and in front of the garage.



The level areas are more visible in this photograph than in any other I have.

The area in front of the cedar retaining wall is level for the trailer. Then it dips downhill until we get to the level area in front of the garage, which extends all the way across to the right edging. Then it dips down again until we get to the walkway to the house where I tried to maintain the driveway as level as possible with only a 3 inch grade in 10 feet for a distance of 16 feet.

Well, that's about enough of the boring driveway!

Debi and I bought this cute little Pagoda style outdoor fireplace at WalMart for only 40 bucks.

For convenience of use I mounted it up on blocks, leaving the inside of the blocks hollow to hold ashes, except for one side in the top tier where we can remove ashes if the hole ever gets full.

We build a fire in it almost every single night.



And YOU ALL know how I like to build BIG fires, hi hi.....

The top looks like a fire breathing dragon for hours on end.

And YES, I've warped the steel sides (especially the back) quite a few times already with my towering inferno's.

A few weeks ago I went outside and took a few pictures from the roadway looking left, right and up the middle of our house. I've made so many changes already to the landscape that I wished I would have taken some before and during pictures. I never have after pictures because I'm always changing something, hi hi.....

So, to bore you to death even further, here is where Debi and I live!  
And don't laugh, at least it's PAID FOR!!!!



From street looking left or easterly.

Notice the terraced hedge, rather than following the grade.



Notice also the nice straight lines of the reclaimed area at the edge of the ditch.



Two newer houses to right of us and two new ones across the street behind me.



Well, I hope I didn't bore you to death with all the pictures, but thought you might like to see where I live, and what I'm doing to improve the place.

I have not started any major projects inside the house other than putting down cheap floor tile in the bathroom and kitchen after leveling those floors as much as possible.

This home was built just after WWII when materials and money were hard to come by. So needless to say, there was a lot of skimping wherever possible. The home has held up well over the years, but there are several corrective measures that should be taken to the superstructure before any serious renovations are started inside.

This winter we do plan on renovating our current bedroom by removing two existing closets and building new modern ones on another wall. The new bedroom would then be more like my office which is patterned after a master bedroom. The floor in that bedroom is currently fairly level and well supported.

This home was built long before indoor plumbing was heard of in these parts, even electricity was not available until the home was like 7 years old. And back then, electric was just knob and tube in new construction, but adding electric to an existing home was done almost any way it could be. Not a single light fixture is mounted to a pull box and many of the receptacles are only screwed to lath slats.

A room addition was added around 1950, so when the bathroom was installed shortly after that, the original single but large bedroom became much smaller. After the children were grown and gone an additional closet was added to the bedroom making it really narrow. Only 1 foot separates the foot of the bed from the closets. However the room is roughly 20 feet long. So by relocating the closets to the far end of the room near the entry door, it opens up the bedroom proper by about 3 feet and also gains an open wall roughly 16 feet long after renovations. Like the office, adding the closets at the other end inside the bedroom will allow for a linen closet in the hallway by the bathroom door.

However, because the original home is so old and requires so much work to ever make it pass code, we are thinking about other renovation options. The original home is included in those options, but the original section would be dedicated to other uses than living quarters.

The garage is built like a brick you know what and already houses my office. It could become a nice apartment, but codes here do not allow that. However, we can connect the garage to the house and in the process make the new section a temporary rumpus room with plans for it to become a spacious new kitchen. The existing garage would be completed as per our original plans and eventually become the sleeping wing of the house. We already have the master bedroom in place (my office) with a bathroom already in the works. We had thought about a kitchenette between the door and office, which could be my packaging area before the final renovations take place, then it will become a huge walk in closet off the master bedroom. Things like that are still up in the air and subject to change as we develop plans that can be done in stages.

The room addition on the home is very well built and does meet code standards with ease. This room was originally a living room but was soon converted to a bedroom. This part of the home would remain as part of the home proper and be fully functional. Whereas the original structure would be converted to office, utility and storage areas.

The homes here do not have basements, they have small crawl spaces. The folks here seem to like this type of construction over slab homes. I have been digging through the hard packed clay in this crawl space as time permits and currently have about 1/4 of the area down to 6 feet below the floor joists. One small area was already done down to 4 feet in order to locate a hot water heater down there. I intend to go down to 8 feet below the lowest obstruction before I consider the digging in each section finished. I plan on using this area to store bottles and boxes for the products I sell. It will also facilitate realigning and supporting the existing flooring as well. Who knows, maybe someday I will have an almost full sized basement. I do have to stay a safe distance away from the footings or the house will collapse in on me hi hi.....



Speaking about my business. My regular customer orders about once every 6 to 7 weeks now. This represents a great improvement in his sales records over the past few years. Because my product is for such a small niche market, the income is not fantastic. After expenses and taxes I have only about 600 bucks per month left over for myself. Which is not bad since I don't have to many expenses, except for those darn unexpected expenses that pop up from time to time.

I do have a new client that has placed a couple of really large orders. But they are in the start up phase of their operation, so a small order, a large order then a drought, then possible future small orders are expected. The large order from them is how we could afford to buy the house, along with the money I had set aside for bottles and boxes. Now I'm scrimping and saving every dime so that when I do run out of boxes I can place an order for them. That will be around 6 grand up front to order a new supply of boxes. Ouch..... Each order of bottles and lids is only around 1 grand which is tolerable and can be taken from the previous order to pay for them. But the boxes one has to save up for.

I just paid over 28 hundred dollars to get my Blazer worthy enough for the trip to St. Louis for Christmas. I really didn't think it needed that much work until it landed in the shop to get it all done. But at least now it will be safe to drive again and should make it with no problems. And hold up for a long time without other repairs, I hope.

Not a lot goes on down here in east podunk. I take Maw to the doctors about 6 times a month. The rest of the time I'm working on something constructive. Right now it's trying to make room to empty the rest of the stuff out of the trailer so we can drag it along with us to St. Louis.

It seems like for every little thing you want to get accomplished, it involves having to handle several other things along with it.

For example, just putting up a fence required a major cutback of the hedge, which then meant it had to be trimmed the rest of the way to look nice. Thus the terraced hedge in the photos.

Along one fence I had to disembowel a very large hydrangea bush against the house and right in the path of the fence. I ended up being able to divide what I removed into 4 more large bushes and planted them along one 50 foot section of fence.

The fence along the hedge row was painted green to make it invisible. Very time consuming. After I trim back the original hydrangea bush, this one will be painted green also.

The mulch around the bushes is shredded newspaper. Maw keeps us well supplied with shredded up paper!



Since there were no changes or corrections submitted or made to the XXXX Directory this year, I will not be printing a new one to hand out.

My e-mail is still [raiar@bbs.galilei.com](mailto:raiar@bbs.galilei.com) or the easier to type [raiar@slacc.com](mailto:raiar@slacc.com), I also have [classichauslimited@](mailto:classichauslimited@) (either of the above suffixes). I respond to every personal e-mail I get, so don't make yourselves so scarce.

We are on the Sprint Cellphone service, with Sprint there is no minutes used if calling another Sprint customer. That phone number is 865/406-xxxx. We rarely answer our house phone due to telemarketers burning it up all the time.

Well, I didn't plan on ending up on yet another new page, but since I'm here, what should I fill the space up with?

We went out looking at live Christmas trees today, but after seeing the exorbitant prices, the artificial is getting pulled down from the attic for sure. One place wanted 99 bucks for a 5 foot tree and 69 bucks for a 4 foot that looked anemic. That's downright crazy! We can get a balled 5 foot from a nursery for only 39 bucks, but I don't need another tree in the yard, hi hi.....

But look at the bright side, I've had a Christmas tree up now for the past 4 years, yeah! Sure beats the heck outta Matzo Ball Soup and burning a Manorah while we sang Christmas carols all night<G>.....

Since you haven't seen me in about a year, be prepared, I'm uglier than ever, a tad older, and as Dink said, my talkin' has slowed way down considerable like. You hafta talk slow down here, else they can't pick up on what yore sayin'! Common English is NOT a part of their vocabulary either. Almost everything means something else!

And bless his little heart, I actually saw a riding lawn mower with gun rack on it being used as an all terrain vehicle in the woods. They LOVE to go a huntin' down here!

And for Land's sake, does EVERYTHING have to be painted ORANGE? Lot's of football nuts down here too! UT's colors are Orange & White.

We live very near Neyland Stadium, every single touchdown they shoot off very large fireworks. The fireworks are nice, but you can't go anywhere anytime there is a football game. All the roads are jamb packed and most of the highway exits closed to keep folks from cutting through subdivisions. 130,000 idiots pack that place every game. It really doesn't matter though, I don't usually venture out of my hole too often.

Debi has been unpacking Christmas decorations and putting them up, a little every night after work. She wants to put the Christmas tree in front of the living room windows this year, so I spent Saturday completely disassembling the old windows and storm windows in order to give them a good cleaning. Debi bought some new mini-blinds that fit right, so I installed those and trimmed them to a perfect fit. They look nice too!

Poor old Mimsy is on her last leg. Of course she has been on her last leg for a few years now, but she is slowly going downhill now fast. It's amazing she lived as long as she has. The vet didn't give her but a couple of years to live after she broke her back about 12 years ago. Myrrh is still doing fine. Chelsea (Debi's pooch) is getting up in years too. And then we have the one year old Beagle, what can you say about a Beagle? It's too big to be a lap dog, but jumps in your lap. Too big for the bed, but still takes up most of it. You can't eat dinner without seeing the head of Loch Ness Monster peering across the table from the other side. But she is cute!

Well, before I run out of space on this page too,  
I want to wish everyone a **Very Merry Christmas!**

Love Gary, Debi, Maw and all our critters!  
Ya'll give us a call or e-mail now ya hear!