

Cover story: Eagleville sounds out its rural roots

By LISA MARCHESONI Senior Writer



Todd Milnar tunes the organ at First United Methodist Church on Thompson Lane.

Distinct sounds of church pipe organs throughout the South and Northeast originated from outside the little town of Eagleville.

Milnar Organ Co. started in 1968 in Nashville but the family business relocated in 1976 to a 150-acre farm on Hill Road in Eagleville, said founder Dennis Milnar. Three generations of Milnars now create custom-built organs primarily for churches.

It was a difficult transition at first from city to rural life but “we love it now,” Milnar said. He even watched a bald eagle dive into the pond in front of his home last week.

While most of Rutherford County experiences loss of farms to houses, Eagleville grew by only 100 residents in the past seven years. Slow growth allows the town to retain its rural flavor and agricultural roots.

The county's smallest town with 563 residents living on 2.1 square miles is located 18 miles from Murfreesboro on state Route 99 (New Salem Highway) and U.S. Highway 41A. The town was incorporated in March 1949.

Mayor Nolan Barham Sr. describes the town as maintaining a conservative rural flavor open to new ideas.

Milnar Organ Co. seems to fit in with the sounds and values of Eagleville.

Dennis Milnar started his career at age 18 in 1961, serving a seven-year apprenticeship at Delaware Organ in Tonawanda, N.Y. Afterwards, he and wife, Connie, moved to Nashville in 1968. They outgrew a basement shop and relocated to Eagleville after a family vote by his wife and five children.

"I kind of bribed my daughter," Milnar said with a laugh. "I told her I'd buy her a horse."

His daughter, Lorrie Ann Compton, now works a diagnostic nurse at Middle Tennessee Medical Center.

Her four brothers, Derek, Jeffrey, Todd and Gregory are partners with their father. Her son, Christopher, is an apprentice, making three generations with Milnar Organ.

Each son and employee Tim Murphy has a specialty and complement each other. Murphy is the only degreed organist.

Milnar hasn't kept up with the number of organs the company built or rebuilt. But he keeps a scrapbook of some of the most unique organs.

"We make a lot of noise," Milnar said.

Members of several Murfreesboro churches hear those "noises" created by Milnar's organs when they worship at First United Methodist Church on Thompson Lane and St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church on North Tennessee Boulevard.

"Picture First Methodist," Milnar said. "The organ is loud. It's a musical sound although it can be booming and shake the walls. Sitting in the pew, you can feel some of the strong lower harmonics of the organ."

"The vibration of wind moving the pipe creates the sound," Milnar explained.

Their business primarily comes from churches with a few individual customers. "We're building one for a home in Franklin now," Milnar said, adding this was the first time they've created an organ for a home. "It's going to be so interesting."

Their customer is a “very famous person” whose identity Milnar won’t disclose.

“The man is an organist too,” Milnar said. “He wanted to have a pipe organ in his home.”

Besides building organs, the company employees travel throughout the South repairing and rebuilding organs. They are the only organ building company in Middle Tennessee.