

Olesen puts all the pieces together

By Mike Riley

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Over the past year or so with COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions, many people have searched for things to occupy themselves with. Faraday Township resident Betty Olesen has found her pandemic diversion in jigsaw puzzles. Just recently, she completed an 18,240-piece jigsaw puzzle that took her nine months to complete.

Jigsaw puzzles are nothing new to Olesen. She had a puzzle group with some friends but COVID-19 interrupted that. In fact, just before the outbreak, they completed a 6,000-piece puzzle. However, she finds that seeking out larger puzzles that are interesting and beautiful is sometimes difficult.

‘You’ll get puzzles where they’ll drop a whole puzzle full of Smarties or balloons just to make it difficult and then expect you to do it and they’re no fun. You’ve got to have an interest in the puzzle,’ she says.

John Spilsbury, a British cartographer, came up with the first jigsaw puzzle in 1760. He attached a map of Europe onto some wood and then used a marquetry saw to cut along the borders of all the countries. They were used to teach children about geography and were called dissected maps, or dissected puzzles. Therefore, a person who enjoys assembling jigsaw puzzles is called a dissectologist.

The term jigsaw came from the type of saws used to cut the specific shaped pieces of the puzzles. Although their popularity has ebbed and flowed through the years, COVID-19 has brought the jigsaw puzzle back to being a popular pastime for individuals and families alike during the pandemic.

The 18,240-piece puzzle Olesen just finished took up her entire master bedroom and her husband [local artist John Olesen] made her a special table to accommodate it.

‘So, the puzzle is seven feet by 10 feet, and you have to leave a couple of inches around the border so it’s not going to fall off the table, and you have to be able to walk around it, so you need a pretty big room,’ she says.

Olesen got this massive puzzle at Mind Games at the Quinte Mall in Belleville and it depicts an illustration by world renowned fantasy artist David Penfound called Paradise Sunset.

‘What I liked about it is he uses brilliant colours and he’s what I call a happy artist. His work is very upbeat. There are all kinds of creatures coming out of the jungle; crabs, butterflies and lizards and I love that kind of thing. So, the puzzle and I had a really good relationship,’ she says.

Despite the largely good relationship, she says that on occasion she and the puzzle had a few choice words.

‘There were a few parts of it that were quite daunting, but it all worked out,’ she says.

Olesen says that in her view, a jigsaw puzzle is like a painting.

‘If you can’t relate to it and it doesn’t do anything for you, you don’t want to do it, especially if you’re doing it for nine months,’ she says.

Aside from her cat lifting a few sections of the puzzle and scattering them, Olesen says the most difficult thing with these puzzles

are the logistics of doing them.

?You need to have the lighting right to see it and be able to reach all areas of the puzzle. I did most of that puzzle standing up and you can't reach five feet in the table so you have to figure out what sections you're going to try to do and do them up close and then push them into position. So that part is difficult but we got around it,? she says.

Olesen says the puzzle got her through nine months of COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions.

?I am a restless person that gets bored easily. And I'd get up at 2 a.m. and do that thing for an hour and a half. If I didn't have it, I think I would have gone crazy.?