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CUSTOM CLEARLAKE TABLE CELEBRATES OKEMO'S HERITAGE.

Vermont furniture maker creates one-of-a-kind table for charity auction.

LUDLOW, VT — Every winter, the Okemo Community Challenge Ski Ball raises funds to augment programs in the local Vermont school system. An auction at the black tie event has relied on the generosity of area businesses to donate products and services. This year, ClearLake Furniture's owner Brent Karner did more than step forward with his usual donation of four \$500 gift certificates. Instead, he put his hands and heart where his mouth is.

Karner, who founded the custom furniture company in 1992, was inspired to use his skills to create a one-of-a-kind piece for the auction. He designed a console table with a unique feature: the words "all come home" inlaid in cherry in the table's maple top. "All come home" is the English translation of the Abenaki word, "Okemo", which is the name of the world-class ski resort in the region.

"I wanted to do something different this year," explains Karner, who trained at the prestigious North Bennett Street School. "The Okemo Community Challenge is about raising funds and awareness for creative endeavors in our schools. We want to reward and inspire kids so I wanted to share the part of my education that has given me a rewarding career."

Karner worked with Okemo Mountain Resort's sign shop to get laser-cut templates for the letters. From there, he carefully cut the wood letters to fit tightly into the maple top. The maple came from a tree that had been felled to make room for an expansion. "It was targeted for firewood," says Karner, who adds that the beautiful grain and striations were meant for a better use. The tree had been tapped for its sap to make maple syrup. The moisture created interesting contrast in the grain, which Karner integrated into the tabletop.

Ultimately, he spent more than 50 hours creating the table, which included two drawers and a hidden compartment. Karner says antique tables frequently feature such secret spaces. People used these drawers to stash their treasures and papers — before the days of safe deposit boxes.

Dr. Cecil Beehler, II, of the Ludlow Health Center, offered the winning bid for table: \$2,550. Karner said the table, if he were to be able to recreate it, would retail for at least \$3,500.

The Okemo Community Challenge was established 26 years ago by Okemo Mountain Resort's co-founder Diane Mueller. The OCC has raised more than \$1 million to benefit charitable and educational endeavors in the fields of technology, fine and performing arts, and curriculum integration in the local school system. Local schools have been selected as recipients for the Community Challenge because they are central to members of Okemo's workforce and the community.