# Lewis "Spike" Wells

*Spike Wells.*
Photo credit: Courtesy of O.C. Parks

This award is dedicated to Stanley Wells, Spike's brother and long-term partner.

Lewis Wells, or Spike as he is better known to virtually everyone, was born in Hammonton in 1951. Jersey Cedar is in his blood. His father operated a cedar mill, as did his grandfather, as did his great-grandfather. The mills operated by the first two generations were located in Tabernacle. One was a steam-powered mill, which were once common throughout the Pine Barrens. It is sometimes said that lightning only strikes once. Unfortunately, that was not true for Spike's grandfather and great-grandfather. Both lost mills to lightning-caused fires.

The mill Spike now operates on Route 206 in Shamong was established by his father in 1944. He first bought a used American #1 carriage mill (the type where the log is carried back and forth through a stationary circular blade). After setting the up the saw he milled the lumber to construct the building around it. Spike and his brother Stanley started helping their father in the woods and the mill in their

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mid-teens. They loaded the logs onto the sled, operated the Caterpillar which dragged it, loaded the logs again onto the truck, and eventually unloaded them at the mill. Spike's father felled the cedars and cut them to length, all with an axe. While chainsaws had come into use by this time many woodsmen still relied on their trusty axes. He still remembers the big chips flying off the log with each strike of the axe. His father's axe was kept razor sharp and Spike was forbidden to use it. He had two rules; no one could touch his axe and no one could touch his shotgun. He tried to keep his sons from operating the sawmill, due to the dangers involved, but they eventually began to run it on their own. They both demonstrated the caution and respect the equipment required, and his father relented and allowed them to continue to operate it.

Spikes parents never really had extra money to buy him the things he desired, so he earned and saved the money he needed for his first bicycle, dirt bike and other possessions. He feels he appreciated them more because he worked hard for them.

As Spike's father grew older he retired from regular work in the mill and ran a roadside produce stand, selling crops grown on the small fields they owned. Other than occasional help from their father, the brothers did the harvesting and ran the mill by themselves. Spike never worked another job, other than working in the blueberry and cranberry farms in season.

Spike attempted to relocate to upstate New York about 12 years ago after he began to have trouble obtaining cedar to mill here in the Pine Barrens. He found the laid-back atmosphere there similar to what he was used to and actually made the move. But the deal to sell his property in Shamong fell through and he returned back home, picking up where he left off.

Spike's brother Stanley passed away in 2018, after 50 years of the two of them working together. This has made the work harder for him. He has two children, both daughters. One is a nurse and the other a school bus driver. Both can use the saw but neither desires to earn a living with it. So Spike mostly works alone these days. In 2013 he stopped using his carriage saw and bought a Simplicity Sawmill. The Simplicity is a bandsaw mill, running off electricity rather than a gas engine and wasting far less wood with its narrow kerf blade. The saw also runs along the log, opposite of how his carriage saw operated, and is easier to handle.

Spike usually doesn't keep large amounts of lumber on hand, preferring to mill exactly what his customers require. He enjoys the custom aspect of the work, producing a product that can't be bought at the big box lumber stores. The majority of his lumber is cedar, but he occasionally mills oak for construction trailer beds. He had a shingle saw but couldn't compete with the cheaper shingles coming from out of state so he stopped cutting them. If a customer has a few boards that were not what they needed or had a claimed defect he just replaces them, no questions asked. He prizes his reputation, depending on word of mouth and repeat customers, and has never had a complaint.

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These days Spike works until he is tired, then stops, and gets help when he needs it. The mill work is just too dangerous to take chances.

He rarely logs anymore, getting most of his logs from berry farmers expanding their fields. He'd rather be at the mill, in case a customer drops by. He never wanted to earn a great deal of money. He is happy just to pay his bills. He plans on doing the only work he knows and loves as long as he is physically able.