

Frank Neat

“The different players, they get different tones from a banjo so you have to figure out what tone they are getting before you can really know what they want, before you know what it takes to get the sound they are wanting.”

Frank Neat was born Adair County, Kentucky. He was a musician before he became an instrument builder. In 1965 he was living in Indiana. He worked at a factory and played a Gibson banjo in a band. A friend named Jim Falkner told him he could make the banjo sound better. When he did it, Frank wanted to learn how to work on banjos. He began working part time with Falkner. Falkner introduced him to some of his customers. They were famous banjo players like Earl Scruggs and Ralph Stanley. In 1975, Frank built a banjo for Ralph Stanley. Stanley liked the banjo so much he offered to sell the banjos Frank made. They called them “Stanleytones.”

By 1980, Frank’s instrument business was so successful that he moved back to Kentucky. He began making and repairing banjos. Now he has a shop in Russell Springs, Kentucky. He and his son, Ricky, create banjos that are prized by banjo players. Frank buys some parts, like the wood rims and resonators, from other craftsmen. He likes to create the necks and finger boards himself. He uses materials like ebony and maple wood. He cuts piece for neck blanks and lets them season for a year before using them. He has designed a banjo neck that feels just right in the hands of a player. He and Ricky cut the inlay work for the finger board by hand. This gives their inlay a different look than inlay that is created using a computer. Frank continues to work with professional musicians to create instruments with unique tones. Several professional musicians sell the banjos that Frank designed for them.



Why would a professional musician want to buy one of Neat’s handmade banjos instead of one from a factory?