

For the love of the glove

Parma resident builds a business by repairing mitts

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By [Kevin Kleps](#)



Gordon King works on a glove.



Before



After

Baseball gloves are stacked against a wall in the living room of the Parma apartment Gordon King shares with his wife.

Spread-out newspapers cover the kitchen table, where King sits as he works on his lifelong passion — restoring and repairing gloves, both old and new.

“Every time I go over to his apartment, I tell him, ‘Gordon, I don’t know how you keep track of everything,’ ” said Bobby Sofchek, a retired Brook Park police officer who has been friends with King for more than 20 years. “I don’t know how he does it, how he remembers everything, but he does.”

When it comes to baseball and gloves, no details are too small for King.

He spreads a ripped portion of one glove to show a visitor the dryer lint that serves as the mitt’s padding. If the lint is white, it likely comes from a dry cleaner or hotel chain, King says. If it’s black or black and gray, it’s probably from the U.S. Army. (More military branches and mitt padding combinations, according to King: Silver or gray and blue is from the Navy, a red and blue mix is from the Marines, and gray with navy blue is from the Air Force.)

He will tell you which types of cattle hide provide the best material for a baseball glove, and why gloves made with leather from a cow feels great, but can lead to problems down the road because it’s so soft.

“I love what I do,” King said. “I love the game.”

King started his business, A1 Glove Repair & Sales, in 1999. Later, after he lost his job as a controller, he — at the suggestion of his wife, Joyce — decided to make baseball gloves his full-time job.

At any given time, he is working on 15 to 20 gloves. He repairs and restores more than 200 gloves a year — “They just keep coming,” he says.” He also sells new gloves, which he gets at wholesale prices, but not until he spends a couple of weeks properly breaking them in.

Sofchek cuts strings from big pieces of cattle hide that King orders by the roll. King then uses the string to strengthen the repaired glove, after his customers select a color.

“When he first started it, I told him it was going to take off, because there’s no one else around who does that sort of thing,” Sofchek said.

King — a huge Boston Red Sox fan who played organized softball for 28 years — says customers will call him at 10 p.m. because one of their kids had a string that ripped or came loose during a game. The glove is dropped off at King’s apartment that night, and the parent has it back in time for the child’s game the following day.

Friends and customers also donate old gloves. King restores those and ships them to the U.S. Department of Defense, to be used by the troops.

John Mengelkamp, president of the Diamond League, said King sets up shop at some of the many league tournament and all-star games his organization hosts in Northeast Ohio. Sometimes, King will provide a quick fix. If the problem is more serious, he’ll take the glove home and send it back when the work is completed.

“He does some pretty incredible things,” Mengelkamp said. And it’s reasonable.

Lacing starts at \$12 and can cost \$40 or \$45 (depending on the mitt) for a complete overhaul. King also removes plastic inserts for \$7, adds padding for \$10, and adds custom-made pinky and thumb loops for \$10.

That’s a stark contrast from the sticker prices for brand new gloves, which often sell for more than \$200.

“The parents and the players, they’re real satisfied with his work,” Mengelkamp said. “A lot of times, they’re amazed at what he can do.”

King will try almost anything to fix or restore a glove. He even created his own mix to condition gloves after he found out a commonly sold oil contained an allergen. King’s lotion contains 11 natural ingredients.

“I don’t think I have any competitors, and I’m not trying to sound like I’m bragging,” King said. “It’s because no one is as crazy about gloves as I am.”

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Before A1 Glove Repair



After A1 Glove Repair