



topics to do with both farriery and blacksmithing."

"*Rural Heritage* readers value Tom's column not only for his expertise but also for his wit," said Damerow.

"Tom told me," she added, "that retirement is going to give him more time to write, so we look forward to his column continuing. A few samples of his column are posted in the Village Smith at www.ruralheritage.com."

Breningstall has taught classes in horse hoof care to various groups and organizations. He also hosted a video, *Shoeing Your Mule* produced by *Rural Heritage*, which was subsequently featured on the weekly program *Rural Heritage on RFD-TV*, the national agricultural network.

Damerow noted that, while the video has been discontinued, it may be purchased by special order in VHS only (no DVD).

Breningstall's horseshoeing advice has appeared recently in *Farm & Ranch* magazine, and for a number of years he has written a column for the *Fowlerville News & Views*.

Tom and Evette Breningstall make their home in Fowlerville. Tom is a 1964 graduate of Whitmore Lake High School, and Evette graduated from Pinckney High School in 1965. The couple's daughter, Vicki, lives in Williamston with their grandson, Bryce (11).

Breningstall spent two years serving in the Honor Guard of the U.S. Army in Indianapolis during the Viet Nam War. Within the span of 18 months, he said, he took part in 180 military funerals.

Besides being a fulltime farrier, over his career Breningstall enjoyed following local government issues..his presence being felt at many village council meetings. He served two years as council trustee from 2002-2004.

He credits his grandfather Breningstall, a village blacksmith in Pettysville in the early 1900s, for sparking his intention to become a farrier. He was lured, he said, by hearing the colorful tales of the trade.

Breningstall noted that Craig Horton, a local farrier, has taken over some of his client base. Now beginning his third year as a farrier, Horton rode with Tom for the last year and a half before his retirement.

As an apprentice, Horton said, "You want to ride with the best guy in the area who'll let you ride." That person was Tom Breningstall.

The two became good friends during this time and Horton said he appreciates being able to rely on Breningstall as a consultant, should some problem arise.

"He was very well respected by all his clients," said Horton. "He's taught me a lot. Without Tom's help, I probably wouldn't be doing this fulltime."

"He's always given me a lot of encouragement," Horton added, "and Evette has too."

When it comes to farriers and horses, you'd probably assume that Breningstall would have his own. Whenever asked about this, though, his response is usually, "Why would I want to come home to deal with more horses after working with them all day?"

By the time of retirement, he noted, he was working with 240 horses and had 90 customers on his schedule. "Horses? That's the last thing I want to see."

His love for the animals is evident, however, as he describes a workday in one of his columns, *What's Next*, for *Rural Heritage* in the spring of 2001:

Tom Breningstall shifts career from horseshoeing to writing

By Susan Parcheta

Longtime Fowlerville resident F. Thomas (Tom) Breningstall has always had a soft spot for writing, along with classic cars.

Now that he's transitioning from his 30-year career as a farrier (official retirement date Sept. 28, 2007), he said he's shod his last horse and will be focusing on the writing life now, and enjoying his cars.

"I'll still write articles and stories and even a book or more if all goes right," he explained in a letter announcing his retirement.

Commenting on his loyal client base, Breningstall said that nearly all of his customers have been with him from 15 to 30 years. All have become friends. "I have seen kids grow up and then their kids grow up, two and three generations of families and countless generations of horses."

Constant as the daily mail...in rain, sleet, snow, hail...his customers knew he'd be there in good times and bad. "No matter what was going on in their life," he said, "there was one thing that they could always count on. Every six or eight weeks I would show up on time to work on their horses' hooves."

Breningstall began to realize that he was more than just a farrier to these families when, he noted, "not one customer dropped me as their farrier ahead of my retirement."

Reflecting back to last August, when he began seeing customers for the last time, he admitted, "The goodbyes became harder and harder for me."

If saying goodbye was hard, why did he quit? Wryly, he added, "After shoeing horses from 1976 to 2007, 'I hurt.'" Shoeing horses is tough work... especially at the pace he was going. "The best thing for me and my health," he determined, "was just stop horseshoeing and give my body a rest."

Breningstall, a certified farrier with the American Farrier Association and the Michigan Horseshoers Association, is a past president of that organization.

He continues to write a regular column in *Rural Heritage* magazine and contributes to *Anvil* and *American Farriers Journal*, among others.

Rural Heritage editor Gail Damerow commented about his work for the magazine: "Tom Breningstall began writing his column 'Hoof & Hammer' for *Rural Heritage* in 1999, covering

"Being a farrier is a tough job. I was told once that it's a young person's job, and that's likely true. But people like me, and some even older, have been shoeing for most of our lives and wouldn't enjoy any other job more. To see a horse grow and learn to do well at what it's trained to do is wonderful. To know we have had a part in that horse's health makes us proud of what we do."

As difficult as his retirement was for him, it was equally as painful for his clientele, not only those who'd been with him since the beginning, but for the new ones, too.

Fowlerville resident Linda Miner grew up loving horses. Breningstall, she recalled, became a fixture in her family's life from those early days. Now in her 40s, Miner figured that Breningstall became the family farrier when she was 12 years old.

"Ever since I can remember, he's been doing this," she said, with a touch of wistfulness in her voice. "He was just the best."

Breningstall worked wonders, she said, bringing back one of her horses who foundered three times. "He was patient. He knew each horse," Miner reflected. "It was as if he read their minds."

He became like one of the family, she said, adding, "We will miss him."

Fowlerville's Tracy Beauregard concurred. "We were blessed to have him as a farrier."

"He has such patience, even in difficult cases," she said. "He never lost his temper and was always gentle."

Breningstall always seemed to know what the horse was thinking, she said, adding, "He'd try to meet the horse and his needs and his space."

It was interesting to hear other farriers speak of their esteem of him, she said.

"They'd always say, 'I'm no Tom Breningstall.'"

Gary and Debbie Spagnuolo of Fowlerville have enjoyed his presence as their farrier over two stretches of horse ownership - for a total, Gary said, of about 15 years.

"We hated to see him go," he said. "Tom set the standard for what a good farrier is."

"Other farriers are in awe of his skill," noted Spagnuolo. "He has a lot of knowledge and a great deal of wisdom when working with horses."

"Tom reminds me of a cowboy from the old west," he remarked. "He had that way about him."

It was his approach to life, Spagnuolo reflected, that made him stand out. "He had a quiet reserve, but very confident. He let his skill speak for him."

Spagnuolo, who also enjoys writing, said they often swapped their experiences in that realm.

Diane Serra, also of Fowlerville, describes her family as the "newer kids on the block" having Breningstall as their farrier.

They moved down from Michigan's Upper Peninsula four years ago, and their farrier recommended Breningstall.

As did many of his clients, Serra soon discovered their new farrier's penchant for storytelling. She loved to hear Tom recount the tales of his growing up years. "We could hardly wait for him to come out, because we knew we were going to hear a story."

"He's a really great guy, and lots of fun," said Serra.

There's more to Tom Breningstall than shoeing horses, as the public learned this past summer. Serra noted that last year he created a board game in response to the hullabaloo over the traffic roundabouts in Brighton.

His horseshoeing clients joined in the excitement. "All his customers bought one," she commented.

Said Breningstall about *The Roundabout Game* and the situation that inspired it, "Everybody was complaining about it, so I thought I'd have some fun with it."

He made about 75 of the board games, and sold nearly all of them, he said.

As for his fondness for classic cars, that goes way back. "I've had a hot rod ever since I learned to drive," said Breningstall.

He currently owns three classics: a 1960 Impala, a 1987 Corvette and a 1984 Monte Carlo SS. A new classic perhaps, could be his 2006 Dodge Charger Daytona. Labeled a retrofuturist car, it's one of just 4000 made in the hot yellow color *Top Banana*.

Working on cars and remodeling the basement to incorporate a gym are on the docket. But mostly Breningstall is looking forward to expanding his writing career. In the works are a couple of detective novels, as well as children's books.

Future writing will be a breeze now for Breningstall, thanks to the generosity of his clients. While he knew they were planning a huge party for him, he had no inkling of what was in store on Sept. 29, 2007.

"It was a fantastic party," affirmed Diane Serra, as she expressed her enthusiasm for what the gathering of a hundred clients had planned for their beloved farrier.

At the party, hosted by clients Michaela and Dan Zint, Breningstall received a little box with a toy computer inside. Along with that was a check, given in gratitude for his years of farrier service.

It was a send-off with well-wishes for his writing career, and enough funds to purchase a state-of-the-art computer system.

"I will never forget them and their kindness," Breningstall said.

While his horseshoeing days may be over, the writer's pen will still be at work...spinning stories from those times, and sharing wit and wisdom with readers everywhere.