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### Jefferson Township Book Restorers One of Few Hand Binders Left in Nation

By: Deepti Hajela

JEFFERSON TOWNSHIP, N.J. (AP)- Margit Rahill stood at the wooden counter, one hand on the tattered, grimy, leather cover of a century-old Bible.

Ever so gently, she inserted the tip of a scalpel at the cover's edge, trying to separate the leather from the cardboard underneath. The first few attempts saw the old material break under the scalpel. Finally, Rahill found the right place, and with a few lifts, the leather came away.

Patience is the primary job requirement at Turul Bookbindery in this Morris County community. In the painstaking world of manual bookbinding, repairing an old tome can take months.

"You can't rush this type of work," Rahill said. "If you think you can't do it today, you just put it away and work on something else."

There are less than 100 hand binderies left in the nation, according to Rahill. Turul was started by her father in Hungary in 1932 and continued here after the family came to America.

Originally based in New York City, the family and the company moved to New Jersey in 1975. When Rahill's father died, her brother took over. After he moved to Florida in 1986, she decided to run the business herself.

"I couldn't really sell it, " she said. "It's been in the family for such a long time."

Now, with the help of her mother, son and a few employees, Rahill spends her days giving new life to books, maps, all kinds of objects that have seen better days.

Bibles dating back to the mid-1800s are stacked on a counter. Textbooks that need new covers are sitting on a desk, and on the other side of the room, pages of a book are lined up, ready to be sewn together.

Most of the work that needs to be done will be done by hand. No automation here, no assembly line. This is about art.

"You have to have the hands for it," Rahill said. "It's not a 1-2-3 job, it's not a production."

"I guess it's about a personal touch," said Dora Bigham, who started out as a temporary employee at Turul 16 years ago and never left.

For a project like repairing an old Bible, Rahill starts by taking the hard cover off.

The books often need new spines. Pieces are cut from one of the many rolls of leather in the workshop, and attached to sturdy chipboard, letters are embossed in gold leaf. The leather spine is reattached to the front and back covers and the entire cover is put back onto the pages.

Rahill said Turul does anywhere from 100 to 200 Bibles a year. Other assignments have included rebinding books for libraries and schools, compiling annual reports in book form for companies, and even a request to bind some documents from the French government.

It's not the most lucrative field, Rahill admits.

Her son Michael has said he wants to continue with the business, which relieves Rahill.

"It's a dying art," she said. "It's nice to keep it going."

The workers at Turul have no patience for modern, automated book binding, where pages are glued together rather than sewn and can fall off with rough handling.

"The newer the book, the quicker it comes for rebinding," Rahill said.

It's a problem they can't help to notice wherever they go.

"I was in the doctor's office, looking at his books," Bigham said. "I kept thinking, 'Boy, he needs a book binder.'"

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