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Posted on Wed, Jul. 1, 2009

## Surgeon's 'cool hobby' is throwing knives

By Art Carey  
Inquirer Staff Writer

Ted Eisenberg is proud of the fact that he has a "cool job."

He specializes in cosmetic breast surgery, and over the last 10 years he's made more than 4,000 women happier by making their breasts bigger, smaller, higher, or more symmetrical.

Now Eisenberg has what he calls a "cool hobby" - throwing knives and tomahawks.

"I work with scalpels in the operating room, but I don't throw them," he hastens to point out.

Since becoming serious about knife-throwing a year and a half ago, Eisenberg, 57, has practiced with the zeal of a fanatic and done well enough in competitions to bring home trophies.

"I want to be the best," Eisenberg says. "But I wouldn't do it if I didn't love throwing knives. When you get a perfect stick - that thunk - it's like the whole universe coming together in that moment just for you."

In his backyard in Merion Park, Eisenberg has erected a target - five log rounds bolted to a sturdy backboard - and there he sharpens his skills with balanced knives, Bowie knives, and tomahawks. He tries to practice two hours a day, every day, and is deterred only by rain, snow, and nightfall.

Driveway markers set in the turf along a well-worn path indicate increasing distances from the target - 8, 11, 14, 17, and 20 feet. Eisenberg, often dressed in his blue scrubs, is the picture of concentration as he takes steady aim, slowly draws his arm back, and flings the knife or tomahawk. Not only must the knife be on the correct trajectory to hit the bull's-eye - a four-inch circle in the center of the log slice - but it must rotate the correct number of times for the point of the blade to stick.

The balanced knife, made of steel, is at least 12 inches long and designed so it can be thrown by either handle or blade. It weighs about an ounce an inch and is sharpened only on the tip. The Bowie knife is also at least 12 inches long, with a handle made of wood, bone, or leather, and is thrown only by the handle because its blade is honed on one edge from the tip to the handle.

Throwing knives has actually made him a better surgeon, says Eisenberg, who was an innovator in reconstructive plastic surgery before deciding to become a breast man.

"My work spills into my hobby, and my hobby spills into my work. In the OR, I'm super-observant, and I bring that focus to my knife throwing.

"Then there's the Zen of throwing over and over. When I'm practicing, I feel calm and serene, and I void my mind and body of outside thoughts. I think I'm better in the OR because of that."



MICHAEL BRYANT / Staff Photographer  
Ted Eisenberg, a cosmetic breast surgeon, throws knives and tomahawks in competition. He stands before targets in his backyard made from log slices. "When I'm practicing," he says, "I feel calm and serene. . . . I think I'm better in the OR because of that."

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Growing up in Wynnefield, Eisenberg, like most boys, carried a pen knife. He admired pioneering tough guys such as Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie who used knives to fend for themselves in the wilderness. He was impressed by cinematic heroes such as James Bond and Crocodile Dundee who extricated themselves from the clutches of villains by throwing knives with supernatural accuracy.

"It's a primal kind of thing," Eisenberg admits. "I feel like I can protect myself and my family. I can go out and hunt. If I had to, I could be a provider."

He pauses, considers his suburban habitat.

"I could provide a rabbit or squirrel."

"Yes, or chipmunk sushi," quips his wife, Joyce.

She is another "cool" element in Eisenberg's life. They met in summer camp and have been married 36 years and have two grown children. He calls her his "catalyst" and "opportunity finder." About 21/2 years ago, after Eisenberg requested some throwing knives for Hanukkah, Joyce was nonplussed, but she managed to find some.

At first, Eisenberg aimed at a maple tree in the front yard, but the wood was too hard and the knives wouldn't stick. Next he began throwing at an old hollow-core door propped up in his garage.

Last year, through the Internet, he connected with Joe Darrah, 51, a knifemaker who lives in Berwyn. Darrah, who is one-quarter Blackfoot Indian, began throwing knives when he was 5 and is an eight-time world champion.

Eisenberg asked Darrah for some coaching. The first visit, the two men spent six hours throwing. "I had a hard time leaving," Eisenberg says.

"He picked up the sport immediately," Darrah says. "His eye-hand coordination is absolutely phenomenal." Darrah was so impressed with his new protege that he made him an engraved "throwing scalpel."

Eisenberg visited Darrah at least a half-dozen times, improving with each session. Darrah encouraged him to enter a competition in Port Republic, N.J., last June.

In the knife-throwing contest, Eisenberg scored 136 (out of a possible 300), a solid intermediate score.

"I didn't win anything, but I got a lot of 'attaboys,' " he says.

He competed again last October at the International Knife Throwers Hall of Fame world championships in Texas. In tomahawk throwing, he placed first in the novice division, winning a huge gold and silver belt buckle inscribed with the group's motto: *Aut sica inherit, aut non inherit* - "Either the knife sticks, or it doesn't."

Eisenberg and his wife made the acquaintance of several trapper-like characters in beards and buckskin with nicknames such as Old Dog, Pole Cat, AWOL, and Ironpost.

"It was a lot of fun, another adventure," says Joyce, who gamely accompanied her husband. "We met people we wouldn't know otherwise.

"I feel like he has a fraternity now, a group of guy friends."

In the world of knife-throwing, you know you're accepted when you're given a nickname. In Texas, they began calling Eisenberg "Doc Ted." But at the end of May, Eisenberg returned to Port Republic, where he matched his knife-throwing score of last year and won two third-place trophies.

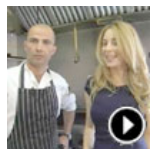
He also earned a new nickname: The Boobinator.

"I think it will stick," he says proudly. Pun intended.

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