



**Woodstock Chimes®**

**Woodstock Chimes' Kazoo is featured in newspapers across the country, including Kingston NY's Daily Freeman (5/27/08)**

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A sign hangs in the factory for the Original Kazoo Co. in Eden.

## Staying true to its name

By CAROLYN THOMPSON  
Associated Press

**EDEN** — The name of the place and its site, The Original Kazoo Co. And boy, do they mean original.

The same circa 1900, belt-and-pulley machines that stamped and shaped the world's very first musical kazooes still stamp and shape kazooes today. And the craftsmen are still in the same building — maybe in the same spot on the floor — making the same lac-lac-lac sound as they perforate and fold and shape.

The finished product hasn't changed. Still the same palm-wood, salt-marine-scraped musical instrument. Still the same ting vibration when hummed into. Some things just don't lend themselves to being "new and improved."

If there was ever the temptation to modernize things as the loose-making operation changed hands over the years, it didn't last.

"It really would kind of spell the end of coming here if you couldn't see things as they were," said Kazoo Smith, as the scoured the factory floors for more workmanship than manufacturing facility. "It's wonderful for our country to know that long ago, they invented this way of manufacturing and it still works today."

**THE ORIGINAL** Kazoo Co. operates on — where else — Main Street in a rural farm town southeast of Buffalo known as much for its yearly corn festival as kazooes.

The plant itself opened in 1907 as a sheet metal work shop, producing stove and furnace parts and piston venting machines. It began making kazooes in 1916 after its owner was approached about making a metal version of the wooden instrument that had been around since the 1840s.

Inside her kazoo gift shop, Smith demonstrates with some of the songs that seem to buzz forth most often when visitors get hold of a kazoo: "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" and "The Boss Working on the Railroad" for adults. "Jingle Bells," she said. "It doesn't matter if it's July or August, they're all playing 'Jingle Bells,' it's amazing."

The place gets its share of tours of school, senior citizen and other tours, all eager to try out the product. To say it gets praise is to "put it mildly," shop receptionist Sue Cruz agrees with a laugh. What has changed over the years is ownership. Today, the site is operated



**TOP:** Kazoo Smith plays a kazoo. **CENTER:** Rick Preschel makes kazooes at the factory. **BOTTOM:** Another step in the manufacturing process.



by Suburban Adult Services Inc., a not-for-profit organization serving mentally and physically disabled adults. The agency inherited the factory in 2002 as a donation from Robert and David Beghesh, after the Begheshes sold the rights to make the standard kazoo to the largest distributor, Woodstock Percussion in Shelton.

**AS PART OF** the deal, the original kazoo factory, museum and gift shop stayed in Eden and is allowed to make and sell a limited number of the standard kazoo — 6,000 a year. They sell in the gift shop for \$1.99. The part-time work force of about 12 to 15 people from Suburban Adult Services spends the rest of the time making

kazoo trumpets, French horns, trombones and other specialty kazooes which are sold on site and by toy stores and other discounters. (They all sound like the regular kazooes.) "It's a real nice match for us," said Tony Amunozato, associate executive director of SASI.

The deal also included rights to the name, Original American Kazoo Co., so the Eden operation became the Original Kazoo Co. "It's complete. I enjoy walking into," Amunozato said of the shop, where, as in the past, more than 30 machines are run by one 10-horsepower motor spinning overhead shafts and leather belts. "It's a nice atmosphere. You don't see that in industry."

**THE KAZOO'S** appeal extends far beyond the factory walls. It gets visitors and orders from around the globe. The company recently got a request for 200 kazooes destined for an orphanage in South Africa. "People like the American-made and they like the metal," Amunozato said.



"So we get calls from around the world ... They find that kazooes are a real good way to teach music to children."

"Music transcends all language and kazooes really provide that to everyone," said Smith. "You don't have to be a practiced musician in order to participate."

There is a technique to playing though, albeit pretty simple: Hum, don't blow. "There are people who struggle with that," Smith said. The key to the instrument itself is the small circular "bell" resonator covering a hole on the top of the kazoo, which is vibrated by the humming.

"If you were to blow into a kazoo, absolutely nothing would happen," Smith said, "and therefore you have to make that special humming noise in order to make it work."

The kazoo is believed to be the only musical instrument to be invented and produced in the United States. Today, the Eden factory produces the only American-made metal version.

On the Net  
Original Kazoo Co.  
[www.edenkazoo.com](http://www.edenkazoo.com)