

WOODCARVING HANDIWORK BRINGS MATERIAL TO LIFE



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by Candi Helseth, freelance writer from Minot, N.D.

Woodcarving has a history as long as humankind. Over millennia, up to today, people find pleasure taking wood pieces and tools, and fashioning artistic creations. Many appreciate the creations; few appreciate the vast and varied approaches of woodcarving.

That's the view held by Frank Koch, North Dakota Council on the Arts master carver, who does it all. Hundreds of carvings in numerous styles inhabit his Bismarck home. His works can be seen in places like the North Dakota Governor's Mansion, on the White House Christmas tree, in traveling shows and at regional museums. For the last 32 years, Koch has been teaching others to carve.

Harwood resident Jim Schrock says there is no end to potential carving projects. While his first preference is carving detailed characters, he experiments with other types of carving, various woods and even new surfaces. He even carves figures and animals out of golf balls. He likes carving because he can do it anywhere. When he travels, his carving bag and a piece of wood accompany him.

When his daughter, Gretchen, was born, Schrock switched from woodworking to carving because of its benefits of being less noisy and needing less space. Today Gretchen, 15, shares his interest in carving and occasionally accompanies him to demonstrate carving at area events.

Schrock and his family are served by Cass County Electric Cooperative, Fargo.


Fishing enthusiast and carving newcomer Brandon Nelson, Bismarck, has a singular interest: carving and painting colorful, jointed fishing lures. He thought the beautiful, but expensive, fishing lures he found on a fishing website looked easy.

"So I researched making them and you just carve them, mold them and paint them," he said. "Sounds simple. But I found out it's really not that simple. Carving takes lots and lots of practice. Starting out, I made plain Jane ones. But now when I put one of my lures in the water, it looks like a fish actually swimming back and forth. After all the time I've put into them, it's hard to put them in the water though."

At the old ball game

Woodcarving's scope is limited only by the nature and desire of the carver. Some carvers prefer patterns or examples as starting points. Others, like Koch, create original works such as the baseball field that covers a sizable spot in his basement where hundreds of his carvings are displayed. The 1960s-era baseball field features about 25 carved characters engaged in various forms of activity. Each personality has a unique story Koch created as he carved. For instance, the third base coach is flying a kite and eating a hot dog because hardly anyone ever made it to third base in those days, Koch said.

"I started with this vision in my head of a pitcher, batter and catcher," he said. "I couldn't quit once I got into it."

For information on Flickertail Woodcarvers, call Koch at 701-255-0280; or go online to www.flickertail.org/ . For information about Red River Valley Woodcarvers, call Schrock at 701-866-4641, or go to www.rtvwc.org/ 