

# WARD WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP 2018

## *Carving Out Community*

By Kristie Clattenburg

The 48th annual Ward World Championship Wildfowl Carving Competition began with the sound of the waves rhythmically crashing on the beach and excitement in the air as carvers from all over the world arrived to enter their artwork in the competition.

Travelling from over 15 different countries, these talented artists made their way to Ocean City, MD, with not just the hope of winning a ribbon but with the anticipation to see familiar faces and create life-long bonds in the carving community.

The 2018 competition welcomed back fish carvers with *Breakthrough Magazine's* fish carving competition, as well as letting the wildfowl carvers spread their wings with the return of the Feather and Palm Frond divisions. In the Lem and Steve portion of the competition, champagne waterfowl opened up to include a non-floating category. Be on the lookout for an expanded species list in 2019 for the new non-floating Champagne Waterfowl Category.

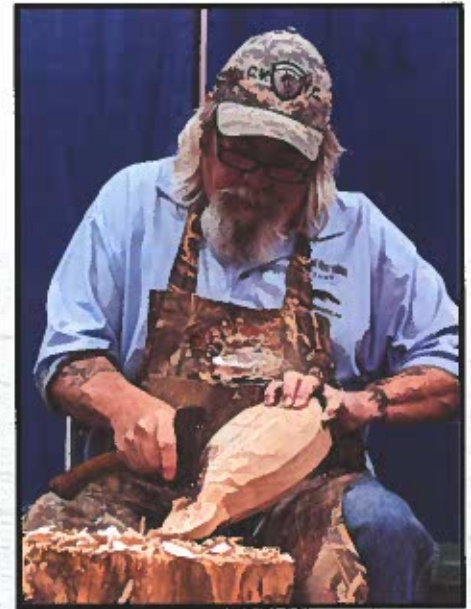
The Education Conference saw classes throughout the week leading up to the competition from Pat Godin, Al Jordan, Glen McMurdo, Jerry Painter, Jeff Rechin, Rich and Ross Smoker, and Laurie Truehart. During the show, the education continued with lectures and workshops presented by Bill Belote, Dan Burgette, Nina Gormley, Josh Guge, Al Jordan, Ellen Lawler, Laurie McNeil, Daniel Montano, Peter Palumbo, Jeff Rechin, Floyd Scholz, Ross Smoker and Tommy Stewart. Participants enjoyed subjects from techniques on carving and painting to what judges are looking for in competition, to

thinking big and more. Look forward to the educational offerings from award-winning carvers at the 2019 World Championship.

Friday morning, the judging kicked off as the competition opened its doors to the public, welcoming them to be in awe of the incredible talent on display in the Ocean City Convention Center. Attendees mingled and appreciated the judging, the entries and the exhibitors throughout the hall. Jeff Bounds kept everyone apprised as to the happenings from center stage. As Friday rolled to a close, the carving community gathered in the Performing Arts Center to celebrate the 2018 Living Legends: Robert Kerr, Oliver "Tuts" Lawson and David Turner. This presentation then moved from the Performing Arts Center to a dinner at The Grand Hotel. There, the food and speeches flowed, the camaraderie ever present.

Saturday, spectators gathered to watch the final round of judging in anticipation for the awards ceremony that would take place later in the day. This year, we had a special appearance, the Wyoming Valley West Marching Spartans from Plymouth, PA, who put on a spectacular show. After the music, the benefit auction began. David Yearsley was our guest auctioneer with Dave Allen of A&M Auctions assisting. Many wonderful donated item went up for bid. Thank you to those who participated and secured new items for your collections.

As the auction came to a close, it was time for the award ceremony to begin. Ward Museum Executive Director Lora Bottinelli and Jeff Bounds emceed the ceremony, presenting awards to winning competitors in



all divisions. Carvers who competed in the Worlds' Divisions waited anxiously to find out the results of the judging. Finally, the moment arrived to announce this year's Best in World winners: Jett Brunet, Best in World Interpretive Division; Gary Eigenberger, Best in World Decorative Lifesize Wildfowl Division; Pat Godin, Best in World Shootin' Rig Division; Leonard Rousseau, Best in World Lifesize Waterfowl Pair Division; and Ronnie Zint, Best in World Decorative Miniature Division.

Jett Brunet, the Best in World Interpretive Division winner and legacy carver, is from Galliano, LA. Hailing from a family of champion carvers, Brunet grew up in this carving community. When asked who inspires him, Brunet named his father Tan Brunet, Larry Barth, Michelangelo and John Sharpe. Sharpe is a particular influence on his winning carving: a piece titled *Musical Guest*, of a chickadee perched on piano keys. The image came to him in a dream. "[I]t was such a pure moment and I could just see that bird on those piano keys and obviously a songbird on a musical instrument sort of caught me," Brunet told Ward Museum Curator Jackson Medel. When looking through his collection of wood, nothing seemed right for this piece, until he was out at his property to burn some hackberry trees that he had cut down. Hackberry is generally a junk tree, not used





for carving, and Brunet described working with the wood as a four-week duel. It paid off, however, with his *Musical Guest* bringing home the prize. Brunet has been carving decoys since he was nine years old and it's anyone's guess what he will showcase next year.

Best in World Decorative Lifesize Wildfowl Division winner Gary Eigenberger also is no stranger to the World's stage. Eigenberger hails from Green Bay, WI, and is a professional, full-time bird artist. His piece this year, *Little Blue Heron*, has a funny story behind it. Made from tupelo and brass, this piece was originally supposed to be a pair of little blues. Eigenberger said he carved the first, which was in a sneak posture, but decided to separate the pair, because the composition wasn't what he was feeling. He sold the other bird to a private collector, and what would become *Little Blue Heron* ended up on his wood pile, where it lived for several years. "About a year and half ago, maybe a little longer, I decided to pull it out again and started carving," Eigenberger recounted. "There was something about the head I didn't like and the neck, so I cut it off and made a different head." Eigenberger not only competes, he also enjoys judging and being able to give critiques, helping other carvers continue to grow in the art form. He also enjoys competing at the Ward World Championships and believes the competition drives and motivates artists to excel.

Pat Godin, of Paris, Ontario, Canada, made the World's stage again this year with his win in World Shootin' Rig. A category that has a special meaning to him as it is the memorial award for his father-in-law Jimmy Vizier. Making the win even more personal was the fact that he did the rig in his father-in-law's favorite bird, the pintail. Godin stated that this year was probably the most competitive year with all the amazing quality of work. He carved his pintails from tupelo and kept the birds' heads tucked down low, to ensure stable floating and that it was appealing to the eye. Preparing to carve these pintails, Godin went back to the real birds, as he does with all his carving whether or not he's carved that species before. He also paints not only with the color scheme of the bird but with the feeling of light. Godin challenges himself to always do better, he won his first World title in 1976 and this is his 16th.

Best in World Pairs winner Leonard Rousseau, from Kneeland, CA, near the Oregon border, not only got his first World win, but he also got to share the stage with his buddy and one of his greatest carving influences Jet Brunet. Rousseau's pair of



gadwalls carved from tupelo and painted with a combination of acrylics and oils took first while Brunet took third. Consulting with his fellow Californian Brunet, they discussed how to create the velvet softness apparent in his winning pair. Gadwalls, one of his favorite puddle ducks, gave him the opportunity to recreate that look. Rousseau first started carving in high school, learning from his dentist. It was then Bill Pinches who introduced him to the competition side of carving. While working full time in orthotics, Rousseau carves as a hobby. "... When they had the winners all on the stage, standing next to Jett Brunet and Pat Godin," Rousseau described, "... standing there in that crowd was pretty cool."

Another new World winner, Ronnie Zint from Hillsboro, TX, took Best in World Decorative Miniature. His carving of a barn owl flying over a desert scene was inspired by the maple burl base. The barn owl, carved from tupelo, represents a midnight flight with the moon shining off the bird in the desert. His biggest challenge with his piece was trying to get a bird up and flying. A professional cabinet maker and hobbyist carver, he started carving with a character carver and together they learned to carve birds. Originally coming to the Ward World Competition in the 1980s, carvers like Richard Finch, Pat Godin, Tan

and Jett Brunet, and Curt Fabre have all been big influences on Zint. "Nowadays you're taught by them, so you're standing on their shoulders to appreciate and go, so it's been great. Like a family," Zint said on learning in the carving community.

Friendship and the drive to push one another to excel and strive for excellence are the things that glue this carving community together. Floor Captain Pam Morris recounted:

The most memorable moment of the 2018 Ward World Carving Championships for me was love shared between two brothers. To be able to witness a family long associated with this event, past world champions who have faced and overcome adversity, rise up and become world champions again represents the spirit of the World Championships. As one brother's name was called as a world champion, the other shouted with joy. As one brother received his award, he ran to his brother and wrapped him in a giant bear-hug filled with love and remembrance of family.

Everlasting bonds, world class carvings and the stewardship of knowledge that will continue the legacy of carving for generations to come: one can only imagine what the future holds.

