

Behind the Scenes of the 2019 Ward World Championship

By Kristie Clattenburg

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Monday: We're in Salisbury, making sure all the boxes in the staging area are closed and taped for transport. We're sorting ribbons, getting them ready for the clerks to place them on the amazing carvings that judges deem worthy on Friday and Saturday (and as this year's weather would see to, Sunday too).

Tuesday: This is the day when the four-day class starts in Ocean City. Aurelio Giannitti, the education director, travels between Salisbury and Ocean City making sure everything is set for those enjoying the Smoker brothers' class at the Princess Bayside. Tuesday is also truck day. Staff and volunteers spend weeks packing boxes and totes, moving items that live in obscure corners of storage into the light of day. Three days takes more than a year to plan and pull off; on Tuesday, we pack up the office and load the truck. We round up last-minute items and fill our personal vehicles. We go home and pack our bags for our weeklong move to Ocean City, MD. Our days start early and end late; our goal to create an event that was better than the last and keep moving forward.

Wednesday: As classes continue, we move into the Roland E. Powell Convention Center in Ocean City — our office away from home for the next five days. With the help of amazing volunteers, staff begin setup. Tables are

covered, the tanks hauled in then filled, risers put together, and what seems like tons of signage finds where it belongs. Registration is set up; at some point in the day, staff check into hotels. Food happens too. There are traditions there; the table/riser group likes to venture to Anthony's for subs. Others duck in for fast food during last-minute supply runs. We finally call it quits for the day around 5:30 p.m.

Thursday: This is registration day and vendor move in. This is the day where we get to see faces we see but once a year and others that are as familiar as our own. Volunteers from near and far arrive to help register carvings for the show. This year, we have a treat for them too! Goody bags and a special volunteer-only raffle. We have quick meetings before we started the registration line and we were off! Carvers from across the globe showed to compete and see old friends. Everyone began making sure volunteers and staff take breaks and grab something that will keep them going. This seems odd to remind people about, but as it happens, it is something that a lot of staff and volunteer neglect to do during the event. Everyone focuses on others' needs. This becomes an everyday thing for the rest of the event. More classes and workshops Thursday, as well as a new event, Artist After Hours. From 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Ocean City Center for the Arts there was a mix and mingle kickoff party for the 49th annual competition. As registration ran until 8 p.m. as well, I missed that; but those who attended had glowing reviews!

Friday: Friday started early with registration continuing at 7 a.m. and running until 9 a.m. Volunteers clerking and judging had meetings at 8:30 a.m., and then at 9 a.m. judging began! Lectures,



classes, workshops and the new addition of panels filled the rooms upstairs, as competitors and guests arrived to view the amazing art on display in AB Hall. Jeff Bounds took his place on the stage and, in tradition, kept the announcements rolling and the competitors and guest informed. Another new aspect to the event this year was a partnership with the Art League of Ocean City and the Ocean City Film Festival. Films from the Festival were screened in the Performing Arts Center on Friday and Sunday. Local filmmakers like Rob Waters and many others shared their talents and helped us expand the Art Festival portion of the Ward World Championship. Outdoors, the weather this year brought in some rough water and lightning, which resulted in us having to pull volunteers, judges and birds from the bay quickly and put some judging on hold until the weather passed. But later that day, we got to celebrate the 2019 Living Legends: Lynn Branson, Keith Mueller and Peter Palumbo. An awards ceremony and dinner took place at the Grand Hotel and Spa. Guests enjoyed a local buffet and celebrated Branson, Mueller and Palumbo and their contributions to the carving community.

Saturday: Judging, classes, lectures, panels and workshops all continued with Jeff Bounds keeping everyone up to date. Thanks to generous donations from artists, the Ward World annual Benefit Auction commenced at 2 p.m., raising

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Behind the Scenes of the 2019 Ward World Championship (continued)

money to help us expand and upgrade the event. Upstairs in the registration and judging office they began the prep of the award ceremony list. Often referred to as the "brain office" of the show, volunteers collect all the judging records, registration records, make corrections, provide updates and compile everything related to competition so we can present the winners on stage in the Performing Arts Center at 5:30 p.m. This year, though, the weather put some of the competition on hold. World Shootin' Rig could not be judged on Saturday as the water was too rough and put volunteers at risk. Rigs would be judged in the Assawoman Bay, early morning on Sunday if the water was calm.

At 5:30 p.m., we began the Awards Ceremony. After years of hiatus, we brought back Ward World Volunteer of the Year award this year – expanded; it was awarded to not one but three individuals who devote so much time to the event: Rich Smoker, Bennett Scott and Jeff Bounds. The gratitude for these individual could be an article in itself.

As the awards rolled on, familiar and new faces emerged from the audience and had a moment on stage. Of course, the climax of the evening is announcing the World Winners. This year, World Shootin' Rig could not be announced so all the competitors joined the Vizier family on stage, who were there to present the Jimmy Vizier Memorial Award for Best in World Shootin' Rig. Jett Brunet of Galliano, LA, took home Best in World Interpretive Wood Sculpture for his port tern, while Gary Eigenberger of Green Bay, WI, received Best in World for his reddish egret in Decorative Miniature Wildfowl. Leonard Rousseau of Kneeland, CA, took Best in World Decorative Lifesize Waterfowl Pair with his ruddy ducks. Finally, Larry Barth was awarded Best in World with his phoebe for Decorative Lifesize Wildfowl.

Sunday: The last day of the event was once again an early morning, as we rushed to the convention center hoping for calm waters – and Mother Nature granted that wish. Early rising volunteers braved the cold water, and World Shootin' Rig judging began. Little by little, more individuals joined everyone on the dock, and the judges moved around the water on the barge. Nevertheless, the answers of whom the last award of the event would go to would not be revealed until later that morning. In the meantime, competitors and guests enjoyed the vendors, films, education opportunities, casting their last votes for People's Choice and buying last-minute raffle tickets. Gathered once again, but with matriarch Marion Vizier this time joining virtually, the Vizier family was ready to present the award for Best in World Shootin' Rig. And to everyone's delight, Jimmy Vizier's own daughter Jessica Godin was able to present the award to her husband Pat Godin for his rig of mallards. With the excitement of the last World Winner announced, everyone was ready for the raffles! Gary Egenbereger claimed the title of Jaymes Company People's Choice winner for his carving of a bittern. As the time moved closer to 4 p.m. everyone lined up to collect their carving, registration papers in hand ready to check out and head home. Vendors also began the process of breaking down. After the last of the carvers were checked out, staff and dedicated volunteers were still going strong and started the breakdown and pack up. At 7 p.m., I was the last of the amazing team to leave, making sure nothing was left behind.

Monday: While the 49th annual Ward World Championship was over for some of the competitors and guests, Monday arrived and we unpacked the truck, the cars, placed the new winning carvings in the Championship Gallery at the Ward



Museum, and we began a week of event wrap up – all the while beginning the planning of the 2020 event, the big 50th annual Ward World Championship.

Thank you to everyone who helped to make this event happy! This event could not happen without your support. It takes a village, and we are always looking for volunteers and sponsors. For more information, please contact us at 410-742-4988 or email wardevents@salisbury.edu.

