

Giving Hearts, Willing Fingers – Ned Conklin

Ned Conklin, 75, was born in Walter Reed Hospital and spent his early years living outside of Washington, D.C. He graduated from Walter Johnson High School, studied animal science at the University of Maryland and later spent the bulk of his professional career with the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service in the Northern Shenandoah Valley. He and his wife, Lorelee, live in Woodstock. They have four daughters, six grandchildren and seven great grandchildren.

Ned has been a regular supporter of the Shenandoah District Disaster Auction for 14 years. His carved ducks and songbirds are highly sought after items, though most people put them on shelves to enjoy, rather than sitting them on water as



Ned Conklin, duck, 2019 auction.

decoys. In fact, the thing that distinguishes Ned's ducks from decoys is that his pieces are not hollow, they are solid wood.

When asked how he became interested in carving ducks, Ned pinpointed a trip to Chincoteague in 1979. He had always like to whittle so he bought a duck carving kit while he was there and caught on quickly. He has been carving ever since, especially since he retired from the Extension Service. After having success with his duck carving kit,

Ned set out to find local sources for carving materials. He discovered Ralph Gochenour could be a local source for basswood, his preferred wood for carving.

It is interesting to note that Ned carves the heads and bodies of his creations separately, if they are larger pieces. For smaller song birds, he carves them in one piece. Ned carved individual feathers for one project (photo right). The effect was spectacular.

A small duck takes about 100 hours or more to carve and another ten to twelve hours to paint. There are up to 12 very thin layers of paint on each piece and the paint has to dry in between coats for the best results. He uses acrylic paint because it's easier to work with and looks nice. What is hard to believe is that at age 75, he stands while carving and occasionally will work most of the day on one of his projects.



Ned with goose with individually carved feathers.

Ned says he carves a little bit just about every day. He enjoys carving as an outlet for "creative expression and relaxation," and especially enjoys carving birds. Lorelee notes that carving "keeps him out of trouble."



*Ned Conklin's
bluebird,
2019 Auction.*

When asked about where he gets his inspiration, Ned says he has an idea in his mind and then goes looking for the pieces of wood that would generally fit. These ideas come from his wife Lorelee, comments from auction-goers or just random images that pop into his mind. He uses various magazines or nature books as a guide for the painting.

As the project is nearing completion, Ned will spend the whole day to finish it, especially if the auction is right around the corner. He completed three items for this year's auction, a duck, an owl and a bluebird (see photo inserts). Usually, Ned works alone and enjoys the solitude. There is another Carver named Lynn Walters that Ned knows, but says very few artisans are crafting wood ducks or birds these days.

Unfortunately, Ned has been impacted by Parkinson's disease in recent years. He doesn't have it as bad as many other people do, and for this he openly gives thanks to God. However, it does affect his hands. Yet, one would never know from looking at his artwork that his hands shake frequently. When asked why he continues to support the auction, he stresses, "We can be senders" and asserts "When I can't do it any longer, God will have something for me."

When asked what he would like people to remember about him, Ned said, "Well, I have thoroughly enjoyed the creative aspect, but it was a gift from the Lord."

Ned, too, is leaving footsteps for those who come behind. Footsteps of commitment to "send" when you cannot go yourself. Footsteps of working through adversity for as long as you are able to give something of value to help the mission. Footsteps of faithful anticipation that when he is no longer able to carve that God will have something for him to do.



*Ned
Conklin,
owl,
2019
Auction.*

The interview came to a close as Ned brought to mind a Bible verse that has deep meaning for him. It is found in 2 Corinthians 12 where the Apostle Paul has a vision of heaven and saw the things that lie beyond earth. Verse 7 says, "Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me." Ned points out that the thorn leads to humility, yet God's faithfulness is found just two verses later: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Ned observes, "This is where we are with carving with Parkinson's Disease; it is a grace gift, it keeps me humble."

How fitting that the last footstep that Ned Conklin identifies for Christians is the exact same one Flora Coffman emphasized: humility. It takes more than giving hearts and

willing fingers. The future of the Shenandoah District Disaster Auction lies in those who see the light and are willing to follow.

As Steve Green sings of those who are going before us, "...Their lives a stirring testament to God's sustaining grace..." Indeed.

[Brenda Sanford Diehl](#)
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