

“ZzzzShzzzzZzzz” The sawmill fired up in the warm, moist Florida morning amid the appreciative murmurs of the men and women gathered there for the annual International Wood Collectors Society.

“Now that’s a nice log! Just look at that color!” Bob Chastain nodded approvingly as the first piece slid from the blade.



Don Iverson with deadhead cypress log

Sighs of admiration floated in the air along with the distinctive fragrance of eastern red cedar. Others nodded in agreement and a discussion of the freshly cut specimen ensued. Soon

more folks joined the conversation, gathering to share the knowledge and expertise that only comes with a lifetime of learning about wood, using it, salvaging it, turning it, carving it, and most of all, enjoying it.

“Must be at least seven feet of good board, right there. How old do you reckon that tree was?”, wondered Vicki Willis.

Gary Green, John Roper, and Don Smith leaned in to examine the log. The consensus, after some debate, was up to 150 years old.

Lunch provided time to talk about the high quality of exotic wood samples Jim Zoellner and Garry Roux had found for the silent auction. Wednesday’s jaunt to the Oyster Bar in Eustis, and ideas for next year’s conference were the other hot topics. Getting to know the newcomers, between bites of shrimp wrap or ribs, was also enjoyable!

Barely half an hour later, Dennis Wilson and John Burris began the trek back outside lured by the song of the sawmill. John Roper, Chris Nothnagle, Dixie Royal and Nevada Rye eagerly followed them after a few forkfuls of warm brownies and the apple pie. However, the chocolate cake and custards tempted several members to linger a bit longer.

“Oh boy, get ready to have your sinuses cleaned out,” Dave Barriger warned the approaching folks with a laugh as he, Don Iverson and Dennis Wilson hoisted a large log into position on the sawmill.

Sure enough, the

intense, medicinal aroma of camphor spewed into the Florida breeze, along with growing heaps of sawdust.

“Achoo!” The hunt for tissues was on!

Later, the faintly bitter tang of red oak earned a few murmurs of approval as the bark peeled away to reveal the warm, pinkish tint of that wood.

Information was humming along with the sawmill. Members asked questions, consulted with one another, and especially with Jim Zoellner, Garry Roux, and Bob Chastain. The characteristics of various trees, peculiar designs marking spalted maple, the scarcity of cedar were all duly considered. However, buying decisions were often based on the advice of old masters in their 70s, 80s and 90s.

The dining hall, with its gorgeous views of Lake Yale, provided another chance for members to relax and catch up with old friends as well as make new ones. Naturally, the talk often led back to wood collecting stories and provided members the opportunity to confer with each other on various turning techniques between bites of Beef Stroganoff or Italian meatballs. Salad fixings, as well as scrumptious desserts were also served at both lunch and dinner.

Whoever said “money doesn’t grow on trees,” was definitely NOT a member of IWCS! A large room full of wooden treasures easily proved that with a little patience and the right tools, one could turn a tree into serious merchandise. Good hearted jokes and laughter flooded the great



Turnings by Dixie Royal and James Gordon, part of the craft display



Eric Oman (in blue shirt) leading the Wood Note Pad Class. From left to right: Theresa Burris, Sharon Baiardi, Christine Henning, Christine Fischer and Marilyn Numan

room as members browsed each other's work, their hands gliding over intricately patterned wooden bowls and trays as smooth as the finest silk. Glossy vases, mushrooms, jewelry, kitchen utensils, knives and even pens illustrated how artists had wrung both beauty and functionality out of a stump. Clever craftspeople had used wood to create everything from intricate bowls and jewelry, to furniture and art. Tempting sale items, like the gorgeous wooden chests made by Mike Luecking, and trivets shaped into a football, plus a silent auction full of unique items and raffle tickets all made for a bit of fun and plenty of conversation before it was time for IWCS to discuss business.

Hearts and flowers to our charming host Elaine Hunt, who struggled valiantly to usher members from the fun and into the meeting room, which was smaller, but well-lit and full of chairs. After spending countless hours on registration and organizing the annual Southeast Regional Winter Woodfest for over several years, Elaine felt she had earned enough gratitude and appreciation from IWCS members to last her a lifetime. Therefore, she graciously offered her Position of Program Director and Registration of the Winter Woodfest, (the Largest Money Maker for IWCS) to Art Lee, Violet and Eric Oman, and Don Iverson. Elaine is now delighted to announce she will be attending next year's event only as a member. Way to go, Elaine! Thank you for all your service! You have made the Lake Yale Woodfest a wonderful and exciting event for IWCS members!

Gary Green had a few items on

the agenda. First, expect more of a presence from IWCS on our website and the internet. He is currently looking for volunteers to help edit and scan in some older but still relevant articles. Also, thanks to Allan Schwindt for putting together a new column in woodworking called, "Members Spotlight." Our members come from all over the world, so it will be interesting to learn more about them, and how they acquired their skills with wood.

Door prizes were also a big hit! Special thanks as well to Lucy Cruise for all her efforts at getting such a great variety of donations for the silent auction, and for packing in all those goody bags! You are also a treasure!

One of the biggest dilemmas that first evening was determining what classes to take and what demonstrations to attend. Some popular choices were making a clipboard with Eric and Violet Oman, a demonstration on the lathe by Lee Sky, and creating a brick patterned cutting board with Chris Nothnagle. The sawdust danced several waltzes down the halls and between the rooms. Why does creating beauty always have to result in such humongous messes?

Fortunately, our members are always armed with cleaning supplies and good cheer, even as several rooms grew much worse before they got better. Why? Franck Johannesen held turning demonstrations on both Tuesday and Wednesday, and Bob Chastain offered many hands-on "Learn to Turn" opportunities, as well.

Anything else! Oh yes, indeed. Our members are very

creative and enjoy learning. Pam Munger did some woodburning, Sharon Baiardi shared her basket making skills, and Paul Troyer offered a workshop on how to craft a rolling pin. Yes, we were knee deep in sawdust by Wednesday night. Thank goodness, Lake Yale has a sturdy vacuum cleaner and friendly, understanding employees.

Periodically, members would head out to the sawmill for some fresh air and to check out whatever new wood had arrived. A few scraps and pieces were not good enough for the auction. What to do? Start a freebie pile! Since the price was right, a few enterprising members rummaged around and discovered some usable chunks.

Raindrops drifted teasingly around the sawmill, sending a few members scurrying back indoors for a beading class by Sonya Barriger, and pecan brittle by Nevada Rye. Kris Troyer even showed how to make an apron from a man's shirt. For the academics, Dave Barriger shared his knowledge on "How a Tree Grows," and Duane Keck was also a hit with the "Study of Parenchyma in Wood Identification", and the pros and cons of bamboo. Yes, the classes and demonstrations were full of noise, sawdust, laughter, and jokes, but they were also a wealth of information.

The craft auction on Wednesday evening provided a bit of drama as Garry Roux started the bidding and held up some great items. Auction donations included carvings, ornaments, jewelry, bowls, chocolate covered almonds (Mmmmm!),



Lee Sky demonstrating on the lathe



Wood auction under the big tent. From left to right: Gary Green, Duane Keck, Chris Nothnagle and Bob Chastain examining a board, Garry Roux, the auctioneer, and Eric Oman

pencils, tools, and pictures to name just a few things. Amid the oohhhs, and aahhhs, were inspections and a few groans as the prices inched higher and higher for the more unique treasures.

The grand finale however, involved two members who were seated Right Next To Each Other. Garry Roux lifted an exquisite vase, polished to perfection. Everyone sighed with admiration! Several members asked for a closer look at the lovely piece crafted by Jim Zoellner, who was in the audience. The price soon went over a hundred dollars.

“Well, okay, \$150!” Eric Oman finally shouted, waving his #59 in triumph.

Don Smith smiled roguishly. “\$200.”

Millie Zoellner gasped.

Eric frowned, clearly annoyed. “\$250!”

This time everyone caught their breath. Garry examined the vase again more slowly. “It is flawless,” he pronounced in his deep auctioneer voice. “Flawless.”

Eric just could not resist teasing his friend before the deal was done. “Ha, what a cheapskate!”

Don leaned back in his chair. “\$325,” he said casually.

This time the whole room gasped audibly. People shifted in their seats to watch the duel.

Eric gulped, “Ehhhh.....right...” He coughed and cleared his throat.

Members waited breathlessly. Even Jim Zoellner looked a bit startled.

Both men eyed each other warily, as if they were mentally consulting their checkbooks.

“\$350,” Eric muttered, appearing dazed.

Don folded his arms across his chest. “\$355.”

Eric hesitated, then shook his head. “Fine. It’s yours!”, he conceded regretfully, and held out his hand.

Then the two men grinned at each other, and with a hearty shake of their hands, friendship was quickly reestablished.

The successful craft auction netted a nice sum, thanks to all the people who donated and generously participated. Our members are the best!

The big auction on Thursday finally arrived, and the excitement was palpable! Although at times it seemed like some of our members, devoted wood aficionados, were simply

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The Cuban mahogany vase is held by Chris Nothnagle is front of Brian Hatleberg, Jeff Nasser, Eric Oman and Don Smith (from left to right)

enjoying themselves playing in the fresh air and sunshine, it genuinely took some hard work. Moreover, three very generous ladies, Dee Kriegler, Joyce Symonds, and Violet Oman all deserve a standing ovation for graciously offering to work the auction table ledgers, reconciling names with bids and keeping track of the money.

Champions of the day were Garry Roux and Bob Chastain, our outstanding auctioneers, who ginned up the excitement, and kept things moving while at the same time making sure that everyone was clear about what they were bidding on!



Smiling with loaded truck: Jeff Nasser, Eric Oman, and Don Iverson (left to right).

Roper, Gary Green, Don Smith, John Burris, Don Iverson, Dave Barriger, and Bob Chastain.

Congratulations to all of our gallant wood warriors who came, contributed, and participated in the



Loading the truck: Eric Oman on the truck, Jeff Nasser, Don Iverson, and Violet Oman (from left to right). Lake Yale is the background.

A very BIG THANK YOU to Ed Bryant who brought the sawmill, tractor and Wood-Mizer, and worked alongside our valiant volunteers. Among our Superheroes who got their exercise on auction day, were John

Winter Woodfest. Your help made this important fund-raising endeavor a real success! Please come next year and help make it even better!!!