

Del Herbert

Del Herbert (b. 1942) was raised in the mountains of Jim Thorpe, PA, where he developed a lifelong interest in the outdoors. As a youth he was a Boy Scout with a pocket knife, always doing something with his hands, and often creating objects out of wood, such as Boy Scouts' neckerchief slides.

Del graduated from Drexel University before working in the Navy Shipyard in Philadelphia in 1965. He transferred to San Diego, CA, in 1967, and he has been in California ever since.

Though college, work, and family life kept Del plenty busy, in the 1970s he rediscovered his love of carving. At first he created and refined furniture, gun stocks, and a variety of trinkets. Then in the mid-1970s Del's wife, Judy, decided she wanted a duck decoy to decorate the Herberts' mantle. Del bought one at an Art in the Park show, and then figured it was something he could recreate. Using his carving skills he copied that first decoy he bought; however, he didn't paint it. Initially, Del was "afraid to paint," and only stained his first seven or eight decoys.

By the early 1980s Del Herbert taught himself to paint decoys, and began pursuing the hobby more passionately. Though primarily self-taught, Del took one carving class from fish carver Bob Berry, and sought advice from many accomplished carvers and competitors. When Del was unsure where to get glass eyes for his decoys a neighbor suggested contacting carver Jim Hopper. Jim gave eyes to Del, and invited Del to attend a decoy show in San Diego, where he became hooked!

Since this time Del has attended and competed in a great many shows, including the Ward World Championship every year since the late 1980s. He states that he has "mostly used competition as a learning tool," and that he finds the critiques and camaraderie of fellow carvers invaluable. This is well evidenced in his admirable successes.

Del has won over 150 Best in Show titles across the country and in Canada. He has also won both Ducks Unlimited and California Waterfowl Association's Carver of the Year title. At the Ward Museum's Chesapeake Wildfowl Expo Del has taken Best Contemporary Antique Decoy in the Chesapeake Challenge, and he has twice won the Best in World title in the Shootin' Rig division at the Ward World Championship (1998 and 2010). Del's work even appears in the Smithsonian Institution. His sculpture of three Aleutian Geese was juried into the Smithsonian's permanent collection and is on display at the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Arts and Portraiture.

In addition to competing in decoy carving competitions, Del has also served many times as a highly respected judge at such events as the Ward World Championship.

One of Del's greatest accomplishments is the ability to share his talents and techniques with the next generation. Del is one of the Ward Museum's Carving Out Future Decoy Makers Master Carvers. Through this program and other classes he has taught the skill of making a working decoy to hundreds of students, many of whom have gone on to successfully compete themselves!

Del states that some of the most rewarding aspects of teaching his when his students go out and achieve awards with their work.

Today Del is retired from his job for 17 years, and he continues to carve from his home in California, where he says he is “still learning!” He balances his time between this and his family, including a daughter, three grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. Del very much enjoys attending competitions and shows, and remarks: “I’ve never met a ribbon that I like better than a new friend.”

For his impressive artistry, well-deserved successes in competitions, and service to the decoy carving and competition community as a judge and teacher, the Ward Museum is pleased to honor Del Herbert as a 2016 Living Legend.