

## **Willamette Valley Woodturners – Twenty-five years of growth and success.**

Walt Thies

The Willamette Valley Woodturners (WVW) came into existence with the signing of the by-laws on May 8, 1997, and completed 25 successful years as a club in May 2022. As the club looks forward to the next 25 years, it may be beneficial to take a moment to reflect on the club's origin, traditions, development, and benefits to members. In Oregon, woodturning clubs started in Portland and then spread to Salem, Eugene and beyond. Many of the individuals who founded Cascade Woodturners (CWT) and made it a strong club also contributed to the founding and development of WVW.

### **I Club Formation**

#### **1. Cascade Woodturners**

Portland's Cascade Woodturners (CWT) was organized in December 1990, at a meeting called by Dennis Stewart and attended by 25 turners. Their first newsletter was published in January 1990 by Bill McCall and preceded formal organization of the club. CWT's first officers, elected in March 1991, were Dennis Stewart, President; Bob Tuck, Vice-President; Marvin Bradshaw, Treasurer; and Jim Jones, Secretary. By the end of the first year there were over 50 members. The next slate of officers (January 1992) included Bob Tuck, President; Ken Leach, Vice-President; Dale Larson, Secretary; Marvin Bradshaw, Treasurer; and Howard Borer and Bill McCall, board members.

In the early years of CWT, these founding officers shared their considerable expertise with new members by providing many programs on sharpening and turning. Later, along with Jack Knight and Ken Spar, these same individuals provided the same services for the fledgling WVW.

The CWT met in Portland but also held meetings in the shop at Whiteaker Middle School, Keizer. Awareness of CWT spread as members staffed demonstration booths at the Salem Art Fair, the Oregon State Fair, and the Northwestern (NW) Woodworkers Show. The club grew to 95 members by December 1999 attracting members from Washington and Oregon.

#### **2. Willamette Valley Woodturners**

By the mid-1990s, CWT members carpooling from the mid-Willamette Valley area to meetings in Portland began to discuss forming a club in Salem. The group met informally as an "interest group" and considered themselves a satellite of CWT. Initially, meetings were held in various shops. In January 1997, Ken Leach, the shop teacher at Whiteaker Middle School, arranged for the new group to meet regularly in the school's shop.

When attendance at monthly meetings exceeded 20, members agreed to form an independent club. The by-laws for WVW were drafted by Ken Leach, revised by a committee, unanimously approved by the membership, and signed by the officers on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of May 1997. The by-laws established a term limit of 2 years for officers to keep the club responsive to the membership and to continuously introduce new ideas. The American Association of Woodturners (AAW) accepted the WVW as their 93rd associated club in July 1997.

The first executive board was Ken Leach, President; Jack Knight, Vice-President; Don Roberts, Secretary; Bill McCoy, Treasurer; Lloyd Martin and Ken Spaur, board members. The officers were all previous members of CWT. The new club was nurtured by CWT members who provided organizing support and many programs. Many WVW members maintained membership in both clubs.

#### **i. Newsletter and Roster**

The newsletter came into existence as the club formed and was an essential tool for organizing. The first issue of the WVW newsletter, edited by Bill McCoy, was dated April 1997. In a contest to design a club logo, the winning entry was from Bill McCoy who suggested a stylized view of the Willamette Valley. The logo first appeared on the July 1997 newsletter. With minor digital touch-ups, it is the same

logo that is being used in 2022. The name, “The Burl,” proposed by the next editor, Ken Blair, was unanimously accepted by the membership and first appeared on the March 2001 issue. The club enhanced its ability to communicate with the membership and the public by establishing a website in September 2006: [WWW.WillametteValleyWoodturners.com](http://WWW.WillametteValleyWoodturners.com).

The first roster was published in the August 1997 issue of the newsletter and contained 23 names, of which 3 are still members: Jack Knight, Don Roberts, and Walt Thies. By February 1999, there were 45 members which increased to a high of 122 members in 2009. A picture directory of members was first published in March 2008, and yearly thereafter, until 2018 when it was put on the club’s website where it could be easily updated as each new member joined.

### **ii. Funding**

The activities of the club were funded by dues, donations, wood raffles and auctions; the first two provided most of the funds needed for operations. Initially the dues varied for family members actively engaged in club activities. In January 2008, the club was made more family-inclusive when memberships became “family memberships.” The raffle was held each month and consisted of wood donated by members. Funds generated were devoted to the purchase of library materials (books, tapes, magazines, and DVDs) available for loan to members. The library is extensive! The auction evolved from a dessert buffet first held in December 1998. AS an annual social event it provided an opportunity for spouses to meet club members and to see their art. The first auction was in December 2003 and included turned pieces, tools, and other craft items donated by members. The funds generated by the auctions supported programs.

### **iii. Agenda**

The meeting agenda followed a format common to clubs in the AAW. In January 2003, the agenda was changed when members agreed to start each meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance. The president then welcomed new members and guests before starting the program, which lasted up to 90 minutes. At the end of the program the next month’s program was highlighted, show-n-tell pieces were discussed, announcements were made, and the wood raffle was conducted, all in 2-1/2 hours. The executive board conducted the business of the club. Reports and most announcements appeared in the newsletter, thus freeing up meeting time for the program.

### **iv. Meeting Locations**

The newly formed club met in the shop at Whiteaker Middle School which had space, lathes, bandsaws, other woodworking tools, and video equipment. The club purchased a speaker and remote microphone in 1997. However, when Ken Leach retired from teaching (December 2002) the shop no longer was available to the club.

The January 2003 meeting was at Dave Walker’s studio on Sunnyside Road near Delaney Road; however, the space was too limited. From February 2003 until August 2008, the club met in the Salem Senior Center at 1055 Erixon Ct. NE, Salem. When the Senior Center moved to the new Center 50+ building, at 2615 Portland Rd., NE, Salem, the club moved as well. During the September 2008 move, WVW did a club visitation to Northwest Woodturners in Tigard, another woodturning club spawned by CWT. In October 2008, WVW held its first meeting in the new Center 50+ building. This facility provides a pleasant meeting space, sound and video systems, and room for the library, lathe, and other club equipment.

## **II. Benefits of Membership**

### **1. Programs**

From the club’s inception, programs and demonstrations have been a mainstay of its internal and community education efforts. The club has been fortunate to have members with a wealth of turning skills and a willingness to share those skills. During its first 3 years the club had 43 programs, 23 of which were given by four members who were previously members of CWT: Bill McCoy, Ken Spaur, Ken

Leach, and Jack Knight. In the past 25 years, over 250 programs have been presented to the club, most by WVV members. These programs included tool sharpening, basic woodturning, finishing, safety, and specific turned projects. These demonstrations are the primary means for fulfilling our educational objectives.

When nationally known turners demonstrate at a meeting the cost of bringing a demonstrator to Salem, and the Thursday night demo fee are paid from dues and any other income sources. In addition, they often provide an all-day seminar or a hands-on workshop supported by a fee paid by attendees. Classes are priced per member to cover the instructor's fee assuming the class is fully enrolled. This pricing scheme offers members the best value for a unique opportunity to learn from a world class turner. The club first hosted a nationally known turner in March 1999, when Bonnie Klein demonstrated making tops for children. Since 1999, the club has hosted approximately 45 nationally or internationally known turners. Some have been brought back repeatedly.

### **2. Sawdust Sessions**

In addition to monthly programs, hands-on learning occurs at "sawdust sessions" where members receive instructions while making chips at a lathe. Regular club meetings usually center on a presenter discussing a particular topic in a lecture format; questions are always answered but discussion is limited. In a sawdust session the emphasis changes to hands-on learning. There is more discussion and sharing between members than occurred at a regular meeting. For a beginning turner, sawdust sessions help to accelerate the learning curve: hands-on is the fast track for learning many skills, especially tool sharpening. Some sawdust sessions focus on one skill, while others are an open shop where members bring questions or problems and other members offer solutions.

During the club's first few years, there were many Saturday sawdust sessions in the shop at Whiteaker Middle School or in Jack Knight's shop. After the school shop was no longer available, many classes and sawdust sessions were held in the shops of Jack Knight, Nick Stagg, Terry Gerros, and Darcy Tataryn.

### **3. Mentors**

Mentors are members helping members. Lists of mentors have been published in the newsletter. This list is a resource for members needing help with anything from basic tool sharpening to advanced projects. Members can receive one-on-one mentoring in either the mentor's shop or their own. The club now has a coordinator who helps pair a member needing help with a mentor. The club values the skills and knowledge of more experienced turners and encourages more experienced turners to remain active in the club. To foster this continued participation, in December 2008, the club unanimously passed a motion that "members who celebrate their 80th, or greater birthday and who have been active club members for the preceding five years will automatically become LIFE MEMBERS and will be excused from paying dues in succeeding years."

### **4. Wood**

Two ideas for sources of wood for members were brought from CWT: the wood raffle and organized wood gathering. Wood is donated to a meeting's raffle and members buy pairs of tickets at the meeting. In the early years, one ticket was deposited in a container. Later, tickets were drawn and called out, the member whose number was called picked out a piece of wood and another number was called; this continued till the wood or tickets were gone. Some wood often was left and some members were disappointed. The system was changed in 2009 to members depositing their tickets in paper cups near the piece(s) of wood they wanted. A ticket was drawn from each cup and attached to the piece of wood. After the meeting, members retrieved their pieces of wood with a ticket that matches one of their own. Advantages of this change were that it didn't take time from the meeting and members preselected which piece(s) of wood they might take home. New turners found this a convenient and inexpensive way to acquire new species to turn, while at the same time supporting the library. The raffle occasionally offered species not easily obtained from a retail outlet.

Another source of turning wood are trees being removed by local arborists or private land owners. With permission, pieces or whole logs may be collected. Early in the life of the club, logs were acquired and transported to Jack Knight's place where they were cut into slabs using his band mill. The slabs were later cut into bowl blanks or other shapes for turning. This wood-cutting work party usually involved many club members and was sometimes paired with a picnic potluck. The first such work party was in July 1998. Members of the work party usually took some turning wood home, and the remainder frequently appeared at a future wood raffle. Club member Joe Torgerson also milled logs for the club. In recent years, club organized work parties have cut logs and pieces and stockpiled them on a member's property. Club members are then invited to visit the pile to retrieve pieces to turn.

#### **5. Purchases Below Market-price**

WVW has arranged for members to purchase some tools and supplies at below market price. In December 1997, Jack Knight initiated having the club buy Anchorseal and instant glue at wholesale prices and resell to members at cost. This has resulted in significant savings to members. In January 2000, double-sided tape and walnut oil were included. In 2006 the club started issuing name badges that double as membership cards. Several catalog suppliers and some local retail stores give a discount when presented with the card: Klingspor's woodworking shop (10%), Woodcraft in Tigard (10%), Exotic Wood (15%), and Gilmer Wood (10%).

The club acknowledges and appreciates the generosity of Craft Supplies USA for the support they have provided the club since its inception. From the club's first year, Craft Supplies USA has provided four to eight gift certificates multiple times per year along with an occasional tool. These are used by the board to encourage members to be active in the club, such as awards for excellence, or some special activity. In 2008 Craft Supplies provided four sets of six tools with tool rolls to be used by the club for teaching classes. In July 2008 Craft Supplies USA began a "Club Order" program. The club collected orders and when it totaled at least \$1,000.00, Craft Supplies filled the order, gave a 10% (13% for many years) discount (20% on some tools if more than two tools are on the order) and free shipping. The order is shipped to a member who then distributes the purchases. The "Club Order" program has resulted in significant savings to WVW members.

### **III Community Outreach**

#### **1. Education**

The club has made a significant effort to educate the public about woodturning and to do service projects. Public education in woodturning and furthering the art through sharing knowledge with others, are part of the by-laws. Education has been done by having a booth at the Oregon State Fair, the NW Woodworkers Show, the Steam-up, and the Oregon Woodturning Symposium, and by members helping to teach safe turning in shop classes at North High School in Salem and Philomath Middle School.

WVW started demonstrating at the State Fair in September 1999 on two lathes in a booth established by the Northwest Wood Arts Guild. The WVW provided demonstrators all day each of the last 6 days of the State Fair. In 2006 the club expanded its effort and shared a booth with the Capitol Wood Carvers. Starting in 2008 and continuing through 2022, WVW has had its own booth where between 4 and 10 members are demonstrating all day each of the last 6 days of the Fair. The club coordinates having enough lathes, and each demonstrator brings their own tools and wood to turn projects of their choosing.

The WVW started demonstrating at the NW Woodworkers Show in November 1999 by sharing a booth with CWT. This continued yearly until 2015, when the show was discontinued.

In 2008 the club was invited to demonstrate at the Steam-up event held at the Powerland Museums near Brooks, OR., on the last weekend in July and the first weekend in August. WVV has continued doing four all-day demonstrations each year through 2022.

Along with other clubs in Oregon, WVV initiated and supported the semi-annual Oregon Woodturning symposium in 2015, 2017 and 2019. This regional symposium is modeled after the AAW national symposia. All of these events educate visitors about woodturning, and they also serve to advertise the existence of the WVV. Exposure to the general public at the Steam-up and the State Fair has been the club's primary source of new members.

## **2. Service Projects**

There have been many service projects through the past 25 years: making tops for children at military hospitals (Fisher House top project, initiated July 1998), wooden pens sent to service men and women serving overseas, "beads of courage" bowls provided to children undergoing treatment for cancer, bowls donated for auction to the Marion/Polk Food Bank, bowls donated for sale at the "empty bowls" project to support community food charities in Salem, and the Wounded Warrior Canes presented to veterans at the Portland VA hospital. Making the canes was a collaborative effort: the Capitol Wood Carvers carved the handles and the WVV turned the shafts and assembled the canes.

## **IV. Conclusion**

A history of this period for the club must include some reference to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. When the State of Oregon shutdown, most cities closed their facilities to the public. The Center 50+ facility closed from mid-March 2020 until September 2021. Our meeting venue therefore was unavailable for 17 scheduled meetings. Fortunately, the club had strong leadership: Jeff Zens, President; Marc Vickery, Vice-President; Milt Engelke, Secretary; Henrik Aberg, Treasurer; Darcy Tataryn, Past President; Scott Morrison, Board Position 1; and Jerry Lelack, Board Position 2. The club continued to communicate via email and The Burl but when it was apparent that the shutdown would likely last more than a few months, the board decided to continue by way of virtual meetings using Zoom under the technical leadership of Marc Vickery. The first Zoom meeting was in June 2020 with 15 members participating. Meetings were held using the same format used for regular meetings, but without the wood raffle. Show-n-tell came mostly by way of pictures sent to Marc ahead of the meeting. A picture would be posted while the member described the piece. Programs were shared by way of video by presenters in their own shops, some from as far away as Ireland and Hawaii. Video was less desirable than a live presentation but worked quite well. Some presentations were so well done that they may have provided more information than a live presentation. This system allowed the presenter to essentially make a movie, edit the content, and then narrate while the movie ran. Presenters were able to take questions live from the club.

In the summer of 2020, there were leadership changes. In August, Milt Engelke, Secretary, moved and was replaced by Brian Skaar. The editor of The Burl, Henrik Aberg, asked to step down and July 2020 was the last issue that he edited. The August issue of The Burl was edited by Jeff Zens (President), but there was not an editor for September, so no issue was published. Then Brian Skaar volunteered to be editor, was appointed, and publishing continued with the October 2020 issue. In 2020 most of the board members were serving the second year of a two term-limited office. A change in club leadership seemed undesirable during the shutdown, and restrictions imposed by the shutdown made it difficult to assemble a new potential slate of officers for 2021. A resolution was proposed to temporarily suspend the term limits imposed by WVV by-laws, which permitted existing officers to serve a maximum of one additional term of office beyond the two-term limit. In September 2020, the club voted unanimously during a Zoom meeting to pass the resolution. In November 2020, the existing officers were reelected to serve in 2021.

Zoom meetings continued in 2021 with a peak attendance of 37 (February). Center 50+ reopened in September 2021 and we had 24 members in attendance at that meeting. Meeting attendance has increased slowly, with the April 2022 meeting attended by 45 members. Not as many as we had pre-pandemic but still a good showing. We learned from the AAW that many of their clubs closed as a result of the shutdown. The full extent of the losses is yet to be determined. For now, the pandemic is behind us, and the club has survived and owes a debt of gratitude to the leadership team, especially to Jeff Zens, President, and Marc Vickery, Vice-President who kept our meetings going via Zoom, found excellent presenters and kept us moving forward during a trying time.

As the WVV starts its 26th year, it is a good time to be a member: paid membership is near a record high, there is a good cash reserve (both in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic), there is a solid record and tradition of learning and service to build on, and the board for 2022 is enthusiastic and brings many new ideas. The current executive board consists of members new to the board or their position, with a good mix of age, experience with the club, and experience at turning. Since its founding the club has evolved and experienced changes with each passing year to meet the needs of the membership. Yet since the beginning, the primary goal has remained unchanged: to promote woodturning and provide high quality educational opportunities to members and the community at large. The Willamette Valley Woodturners functions by way of volunteers doing what is necessary to make the club run smoothly. The club does well because the spirit of volunteerism runs high.

**N. B.** The author thanks founding members Jack Knight, Ken Leach, and Don Roberts, for remembrances, discussions, and constructive comments, during the preparation of this history; thanks also to members Dick Powel, Brian Skaar, and Darcy Tataryn for detailed and constructive reviews; and thanks to Karen Esterholdt for editing the final manuscript.

5/08/2022