

Uniontown artist able to carve out his own niche



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Artist Pete Pasqua's bust titled 'Owen Nelson, M.D.,' earned him one of two People's Choice Awards during a juried exhibition sponsored by the Uniontown Art Club.

By Les Harvath

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Thirteen years ago, Pete Pasqua of Uniontown experienced one of those life-altering moments.

Casually shopping one evening, Pasqua wandered into a store and noticed a set of specialized carving knives and chisels. Even though his lifetime occupation was as a communications and systems analyst, for 20 years with Motorola Communications in Greensburg and nearly the same amount of time for Fayette County 911 — he retired in 2011 — he bought the set for \$70.

“I told myself I deserved it,” he said, recalling the fateful night. “I told myself I was going to try my hand at carving. I had nothing to lose. I always thought I could do something like that, but never took the time to get started and become involved.”

But become involved he did. He went home and did a relief carving and now is at it every day, to the tune of carving about 2,000 pieces of various subjects a year.

“It was fun for me to work with the tools and create an art object from a piece of wood,” he said. “Word began to spread about my work and people noticed and liked my work and my art and they began to purchase my pieces. When I started carving I actually had no intention to sell anything and making money by carving the wood was the farthest thing from my mind, but it takes a long time to hand-carve something and I eventually began accepting money for my pieces.”

Not only does he accept payment for his carvings, but Pasqua, who resides in Uniontown, has attracted attention to his pieces by showing his work at such venues as the Touchstone Center for Crafts in Farmington, at the Monongalia Arts Center, Morgantown; at Watson's Choice Bed and Breakfast in Uniontown; and at the Fayette County Fair. Pasqua also makes appearances at area arts and craft shows, and sells some of his creations on ebay.

When asked if he was a professional artist, his response was brief: “I sell my work,” he said. “My work is not crafty but rather more art. I'm not in it to make money but I do sell some pieces.”

But Pasqua's success proved to be worth more than money earlier this summer when he was selected as one of two recipients (with Frank Jaworowski of West Newton the other) of the Touchstone Center for Crafts People's Choice Award during a juried exhibition sponsored by the Uniontown Art Club. Throughout the weeklong exhibit, visitors were encouraged to vote for their favorite piece of art in the juried exhibition, noted Uniontown Art Club president Beverly DeMotte, and they selected Pete and Frank as the winners.

Pasqua, 64, received the honor for his wood sculpture titled "Owen Nelson, M.D.," a 14-inch-high carving made from bass wood from a linden tree, Pasqua explained. "This wood is white and has a dense grain and holds features well. I used three 6-inch-by-6-inch blocks of wood, glued together, and stained it dark walnut and coated it with a polyurethane finish. It looks like glass, and you can actually see the graining of the wood."

For the bust of Dr. Nelson, commissioned by the physician's girlfriend, Pasqua spent about 150 hours carving the piece. He based his work on four photographs of the doctor.

In addition to the bass wood, Pasqua uses butternut, cherry, maple, and black walnut woods. He uses only hand tools such as chisels and knives, and no power tools.

One of the first commissioned pieces was a 2-foot-high sculpture of his wife's grandfather, which he completed in nearly 100 hours, working in his shop at home. Other works include a relief carving of Pope John Paul II; a bust of Victor DeWeese, father of former state legislator Bill DeWeese, which took Pasqua some 60 hours, based on a photograph; and a carving of a body of a coal miner, which he entered in the Fayette County Fair several years ago, earning a Best of Show award.

Smaller pieces include walking sticks with faces, referred to as wood spirits or good luck charms, and faces he carves in pencils using a penknife, which take approximately 10 minutes from start to finish. "I give the pencils to kids at different shows," he said, or he sells them for \$3 or \$4.

In addition to Pasqua's honor through the Uniontown Art Club and Touchstone this summer, he received an award of merit for the same piece from the Monongalia Arts Center in Morgantown.

Ro Brooks, Monongalia Arts Center executive director, referred to Pasqua as "quite a talent and a lovely person. His work is stunning and unique, and he keeps his work very individualized. As talented as he is and as much an artisan as he is he keeps his prices in a range for ordinary people to appreciate and afford. I met his wife-to-be and she told me about him, and showed me some samples. I was impressed with him both as an artist and as a person. I've sold his pieces over the years, and he is very modest about his work. I would love to present him in a solo show."

Not bad for a \$70 investment.

Les Harvath is a contributing writer for Trib Total Media.

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