



Spring  
2025

## Backwoods Shenanigans: A Moonshinin' Diorama for the Ages

Well, folks, if there ever was a scene straight outta Hazzard County, this is it! The fine folks at the West Wisconsin Wood Carvers Guild have outdone themselves once again, thanks to the artistry of our own Dennis Johnson. With 30 years of carving experience under his belt and nearly as many as a guild member, Dennis has brought a slice of outlaw Americana to life with his latest diorama—a backwoods moonshine still that looks like it could start bubblin' any minute!

Tucked away deep in the woods, this masterfully carved display captures the essence of old-fashioned outlaw enterprise. Front and center is a fully operational (strictly decorative, of course) moonshine still, puffin' away like Uncle Jesse just fired it up for the weekend. The barrels and copper pipes are all in place, and you can just imagine the sweet smell of corn mash in the air. The moonshiners themselves—likely distant cousins of the Duke boys—are hard at work, makin' sure their operation stays one step ahead of the law.

Now, any good bootlegging outfit knows that a still can't run itself, and these fellas have the system down pat. One's tending the fire, makin' sure that 'shine is distillin' just right, while another keeps an eye out for uninvited guests—whether it be revenuers, nosy neighbors, or thirsty opportunists lookin' for a free sample. The third, well, he might've sampled a little too much of the product and is currently leaned back in a rickety wooden chair, straw hat pulled over his face, takin' what we'd call a "quality control nap."

Of course, no good bootlegging scene is complete without a pack of loyal hound dogs. Ears perked and



**Diorama Left Side with animals**



**Right Side with Hounds**



noses to the ground, they're ready to alert their masters at the first sign of trouble. One's howlin' at somethin' movin' in the bushes, while another is lazily loungin' in the sun, clearly unbothered by the day's work. You can just picture 'em springin' to life if the wrong kind of visitor comes trottin' up that dirt path.

And let's not forget the essential outpost of any respectable hideaway—the outhouse. Yep, even outlaws gotta answer nature's call! This little wooden shack, complete with the classic crescent moon carved in the door, is the kind of detail that makes this diorama come alive. Maybe one of the moonshiners is in there, takin' a break from all the hard labor, or maybe it's just sittin' there, waitin' to be tipped over in some classic backwoods prank.

Adding to the charm, the scene is brimming with woodland critters sneakin' around, wonderin' what all the commotion's about. A raccoon's pokin' its head out from behind a stump, probably wonderin' if there's any moonshine to swipe. A possum's hangin' from a nearby branch, lookin' like it might just play dead if things get too rowdy. And let's not forget the ol' barn owl, watchin' over the whole operation from its perch, likely judgin' these fellas' life choices.

The attention to detail in this diorama is nothing short of remarkable. Every wrinkle in the moonshiners' overalls, every whisker on the hounds, every knot in the wood—each element has been carefully crafted by Dennis's skilled hands. The expressions on the characters' faces tell a story all their own. Whether it's the sly grin of the fella stokin' the fire, the determined look of the lookout, or the pure bliss of the snoozin' moonshiner, you can almost hear their banter and laughter as they go about their business.

It's a scene straight out of a time when the best way to make a livin'—or at least a little extra pocket money—was through a homemade still and a little bit of know-how. Back then, bootlegging wasn't just a trade; it was a way of life. And while we ain't suggestin' anybody go dustin' off an old family recipe, this diorama is a perfect tribute to a colorful chapter of American history.



So, if you ever wondered what life was like before fancy breweries and distilleries took over, swing by and take a gander at this masterpiece. Just don't go sniffin' too close—you might catch a whiff of somethin' stronger than pine sap!



# Dennis Johnson

## Dennis Johnson's Remarkable Figure Carvings

Dennis Johnson's passion for carving figures is evident in his diverse and imaginative creations. His work spans an incredible range, showcasing both traditional techniques and creative storytelling through wood. Two of his recent pieces highlight the depth of his skill and artistic vision.

The first piece, a "worm wood," is masterfully carved from basswood and seamlessly integrated into a piece of bark on a burl. This fusion of natural elements and expert carving demonstrates Dennis's ability to bring organic materials to life. The careful placement of the carved worm within the rugged textures of the bark adds a level of realism that makes the piece truly stand out.

The second carving is a striking representation of a "green man" sitting in a dentist's chair—an image sure to send a shiver down anyone's spine. The fear in the figure's eyes is palpable, and each individual tooth is meticulously rendered, adding to the eerie realism of the scene. This piece marks one of Dennis's first forays into chainsaw carving, yet it already exhibits a refined quality. By utilizing his signature knives and gouges, he has added layers of character and detail, ensuring that even his larger, rough-cut work retains the fine craftsmanship of his smaller carvings.

Dennis's ability to transition between different carving styles and subjects is a testament to his talent and dedication. Whether using traditional hand tools or experimenting with chainsaw carving, he brings out the personality and emotion in his figures, making each piece uniquely captivating. His work continues to inspire fellow members of the Guild, reminding us all of the boundless possibilities within the art of wood carving.



**Carving in Wormwood**



**Working with Chainsaw**

# Chip Carving by Charlene



## Charlene Lynum's New Project: A Chip-Carved Coat Rack

Charlene Lynum has embarked on an exciting new project, showcasing her mastery of traditional chip carving. This time, she has taken on the challenge of creating a beautifully detailed coat rack, a functional yet artistic piece that will undoubtedly become a showstopper.

The foundation of this stunning project was crafted by her husband, Kim Lynum, whose woodworking expertise ensured a flawless base for Charlene's carving. The joinery in the piece is impeccable—precise, sturdy, and seamless. Kim's craftsmanship provided the perfect canvas for Charlene's intricate design, setting the stage for her to exhibit her renowned chip carving skills.

True to form, Charlene designed an elaborate pattern that blends Norwegian and Swiss chip carving traditions. This meticulous technique involves removing small, triangular chips from the wood's surface to create striking geometric patterns and flowing designs. Her choice of motifs and layout transforms the coat rack into a functional work of art, demonstrating her deep understanding of the craft.

What makes Charlene's work particularly remarkable is the crispness of her cuts and the sharp ridges that define each chip. Achieving such precision requires years of practice, steady hands, and an intimate knowledge of how the wood responds to each delicate cut. The finished product reflects not only her skill but also her

patience and passion for the art of chip carving.

Chip carving has long been a tradition in Norwegian and Swiss decorative arts, commonly used to embellish household items such as plates, boxes, and furniture. By incorporating this age-old technique into a modern, everyday object like a coat rack, Charlene bridges the past with the present, keeping the tradition alive while adding her own unique touch.

Guild members and visitors alike will have the chance to see Charlene's coat rack up close at upcoming meetings and events. Her work serves as an inspiration to both seasoned and aspiring carvers, illustrating how chip carving can transform even the most practical of items into something truly extraordinary.

With Kim's flawless woodworking and Charlene's masterful carving, this project stands as a testament to both craftsmanship and artistry. Whether displayed in a home or showcased at a carving exhibition, this coat rack is sure to turn heads and spark admiration. We look forward to seeing what Charlene creates next!



## Spotlight on Jeanne Henning: Master of Relief Carving

Among the talented members of the West Wisconsin Wood Carvers Guild, Jeanne Henning stands out as a master of relief carving, particularly in the Stenman style. Her intricate and expressive carvings capture both fine details and deep emotion, making her work highly admired within the carving community.

Jeanne's skill has led to several commissioned projects, with clients requesting custom carvings of beloved pets and people. Beyond her commissioned work, she carves for the sheer joy of the craft, often creating meaningful pieces for friends and for her own collection. Each carving she completes is a testament to her dedication, patience, and artistic vision.

Speaking with Jeanne about her work is always a delight. She shares her passion with enthusiasm, offering insights into her process, techniques, and inspirations. Her knowledge and experience make her a valued member of the Guild, and her willingness to share her expertise helps to inspire fellow carvers.

One of Jeanne's most striking pieces is a relief carving of a Marine, a powerful tribute to those who serve. The sculpture captures the strength and character of its subject, with meticulous detail bringing the uniform and expression to life. Every fold in the fabric, every badge and insignia, and the resolute gaze of the Marine are carved with a precision that evokes admiration and respect. The depth of the carving creates a striking three-dimensional effect, making the figure seem almost lifelike. This piece, like much of Jeanne's work, demonstrates her ability to infuse emotion and realism into wood, honoring both the subject and the craft itself.

Whether creating a heartfelt tribute for a client or crafting a piece purely for artistic expression, Jeanne's relief carvings continue to captivate and impress. Her work not only showcases technical expertise but also tells a story, drawing viewers into the emotions and experiences of her subjects. We are fortunate to have such a talented artist among us, and we look forward to seeing more of her remarkable work in the future!



This newsletter is published quarterly. The editor is Rich Thelen at [rlthelen@charter.net](mailto:rlthelen@charter.net). Send information for inclusion to this email. This might include suggestions, pictures and discussion of events.

## Megan Lee Learns the Art of Sharpening

The West Wisconsin Wood Carvers Guild is always excited to welcome new members, and Megan Lee has quickly become a valued addition to the group. Having joined just a couple of months ago, Megan's enthusiasm and eagerness to learn have made a lasting impression. Her positive energy brightens up the room, and her dedication to improving her skills is evident.

Recently, Megan has taken on the essential skill of sharpening, guided by veteran carver Wayne Dubberke. Sharpening is a fundamental aspect of wood carving, ensuring tools remain in optimal condition for precise and safe carving. Under Wayne's expert instruction, Megan is learning the nuances of this critical skill, from selecting the right abrasives to perfecting the stropping technique.

Displayed during their sharpening session were several grades of abrasive sandpaper, demonstrating the progression from coarse to fine grits. Wayne also introduced Megan to different types of stropping sticks, used to refine and maintain a razor-sharp edge on carving tools. Understanding these tools and techniques is vital for any carver, and Megan is quickly grasping the importance of proper tool maintenance.

As Megan continues to develop her skills, her enthusiasm and willingness to learn serve as an inspiration to both new and experienced carvers alike. The Guild is fortunate to have such a dedicated member, and we look forward to seeing her progress as she hones her craft. With guidance from seasoned mentors like Wayne, Megan is well on her way to mastering one of the most crucial aspects of wood carving—keeping tools sharp and ready for precision work.

