



Spring
2026

Building Visibility Through Presence: Two Events, One Strategy

One of the most effective ways for the West Wisconsin Wood Carvers Guild to grow is also one of the simplest: show up, carve, and talk to people. In an age where digital outreach dominates attention, there is still no substitute for the tactile, personal connection that happens when someone sees a carving take shape right in front of them. Two recent events—the Folk Art Festival at the Chippewa Valley Museum and the annual Karve-In in Westby—demonstrate how intentional presence, paired with a broader visibility strategy, is helping the guild expand its reach and attract new members.

The Folk Art Festival: Visibility at the Community Level

The Folk Art Festival provided an ideal setting to engage directly with the Chippewa Valley community. Representing the guild were Virginia Meyer, Sarah Brower, and Allison Deering, each bringing not only their carving skills but also their enthusiasm for sharing the craft.

Their booth became more than just a display—it became a point of interaction. Visitors were drawn in by the visual appeal of the carvings, but they stayed for the conversations. Questions ranged from the basics—“How do you get started?”—to deeper discussions about technique, tools, and the different styles of carving. This kind of engagement is exactly where the guild’s growth begins.

What made this event particularly successful was the intentional invitation to participate. Rather than simply showcasing finished pieces, the team focused on making the craft approachable. That message—*you can do this too*—resonated. Several attendees took the next step and joined the guild after the event, a direct result of that welcoming, hands-on presence.



Chippewa Valley Folk Art Festival

This is where the guild’s broader strategy becomes clear. Visibility is not just about being seen; it’s about being understood. The Folk Art Festival allowed the guild to present carving not as an abstract or intimidating art form, but as an accessible, rewarding activity that anyone can learn. That shift in perception is critical to attracting new members.

Extending Reach Through Social Media

Events like the Folk Art Festival don’t end when the tables are packed up. They serve as content engines for the guild’s growing social media presence. Photos of demonstrations, conversations with visitors, and finished pieces all become part of a larger narrative shared online.

This is where the guild’s “Learn by Doing” philosophy aligns perfectly with digital outreach. Social media posts that show real people carving in real time reinforce the message that the guild is active, welcoming, and engaged. They also extend the reach of the event far beyond those who attended in person.

A visitor who stopped by the booth might later see a photo of themselves—or a piece they admired—on the guild’s page. That reinforces the connection. Meanwhile, someone who never attended the festival may discover the guild for the first time through those same posts. In both cases, the combination of in-person presence and online storytelling amplifies visibility in a way that neither could achieve alone.



The Westby Karve-In: Strengthening the Carving Network

While the Folk Art Festival focused on community outreach, the Karve-In in Westby served a different but equally important purpose: strengthening connections within the carving community itself.

This annual event draws carvers from across the Driftless region, creating a space where experience, technique, and camaraderie are shared freely. Attending from the guild were Sarah Brower, Virginia Meyer, John Allen and his wife Dottie, along with Jan Jenson and Charlene Lynum, who hosted their own tables to demonstrate carving and sell their work.

Events like the Karve-In are where relationships are built—not just between individuals, but between guilds. These connections matter. They create opportunities for collaboration, shared learning, and cross-promotion. When one guild grows stronger, the entire carving community benefits.

Jan Jenson’s presence was especially notable, as she showcased not only her carving but also her latest accomplishment: the publication of her third book on Old World Chip Carving. Achievements like this elevate the profile of the entire guild. They demonstrate depth, expertise, and a commitment to preserving and advancing the craft.

Charlene Lynum’s demonstrations and sales further reinforced another key aspect of visibility: showing that carving has both artistic and practical value. Visitors see not just a hobby, but a skill that can produce meaningful, even marketable, work.

Learning, Sharing, and Recruiting

The Karve-In also reinforces the guild’s internal strength.

Karve-In 10 at Westby

Members return with new ideas, techniques, and inspiration that feed directly back into meetings, classes, and demonstrations. This continuous exchange keeps the guild dynamic and relevant.

At the same time, the event serves as a recruiting ground—not necessarily for immediate membership, but for long-term relationships. Carvers who meet at Westby may later attend each other’s events, collaborate on projects, or refer newcomers. This network effect expands the guild’s reach in ways that are difficult to measure but undeniably powerful.

Aligning Events with Strategy

When viewed together, the Folk Art Festival and the Karve-In illustrate a balanced approach to growth:

Community-facing events (like the Folk Art Festival) introduce new people to carving and invite them into the guild.

Community-building events (like the Karve-In) strengthen skills, relationships, and reputation within the broader carving world.

Both are essential. One brings people in; the other builds the foundation that keeps them engaged.

The Bigger Picture: Visibility as a System

These efforts are not isolated. They are part of a larger, intentional system designed to

increase visibility and membership:

In-person presence creates immediate, memorable interactions.

Demonstrations make the craft accessible and engaging.

Personal invitations convert interest into action.

Social media extends and reinforces the message.

Regional events build credibility and connections.

When these elements work together, they create momentum. Each event feeds the next. Each new member brings new energy. Each post reaches a little further.

Looking Ahead

The success of these two events confirms that the guild's strategy is working. People are not only noticing—they are joining. The challenge now is to maintain and build on that momentum.

That means continuing to seek out opportunities for public engagement, encouraging members to participate in regional events, and consistently sharing the guild's story online. It also means recognizing that every interaction—whether at a festival table or in a gymnasium in Westby—is part of a larger narrative about who the guild is and what it offers.

At its core, the message remains simple: carving is something you can learn, enjoy, and share. By showing up and demonstrating that truth—both in person and online—the West Wisconsin Wood Carvers Guild is not just increasing its visibility. It is building a community that will continue to grow for years to come.



Karve-In 10 at Westby



Jan Jenson and Charlene Lynum's Tables

Looking Ahead to 2026: Building on What Works

As we begin a new year, it's natural to look both backward and forward—to take stock of where we've been and to think carefully about where we're headed. For the West Wisconsin Wood Carvers Guild, 2025 was a solid year of steady progress, and one worth reflecting on as we plan for 2026.

Over the past year, our membership grew, our fall Show & Sale brought new faces into the room, and our newsletters and social media efforts helped raise awareness of the Guild in the wider community. More people now recognize our name. More people are following along with what we do. Perhaps most importantly, people are getting used to seeing us—and that kind of visibility doesn't happen by accident.

It's the result of many small, consistent efforts: members showing up, sharing their work, volunteering at events, contributing photos, writing articles, and welcoming newcomers. These are not flashy accomplishments, but they are meaningful ones, and they provide a strong foundation as we look ahead.

A Simple Guiding Idea for 2026

As the Board spent time discussing the year ahead, we agreed that the most effective strategy for 2026 is not to reinvent who we are, but to build intentionally on what already works. Out of those conversations came a simple guiding idea:

In 2026, the West Wisconsin Wood Carvers Guild will focus on showing the people, process, and joy of carving—consistently and visibly—so our community can grow naturally.

That sentence may sound straightforward, but it reflects something important about how we want to move forward. Rather than chasing numbers or trying to be something we're not, this approach emphasizes authenticity, consistency, and openness. It trusts that if people can clearly see who we are and how we operate, the right kind of growth will follow.

Showing the Process, Not Just the Results

One of the themes that emerged clearly in our discussions is the importance of showing the *process* of carving, not just finished work. Completed carvings are inspiring, and they should continue to be celebrated. At the same time, many people who are curious about carving never take the first step because they assume everyone else already knows what they're doing.

Those of us who have been carving for years know that this isn't true. Every carver—no matter how skilled—started somewhere. We all remember the first cuts, the mistakes, the broken tips, the learning that came from trying again.

In 2026, we want to do a better job of showing that side of carving as well:

Work in progress

Simple projects alongside advanced ones

Teaching moments at meetings

The conversations, questions, and shared problem-solving that happen around the tables

This helps potential members see that the Guild isn't just a place to admire finished work—it's a place to learn, to practice, and to grow.

Highlighting People and Fellowship

Another strength of the Guild is something that doesn't always show up in photos of carvings alone: the people. The fellowship, encouragement, and generosity of knowledge within the Guild are among its greatest assets.

In the coming year, we want to make those human connections more visible. That might mean featuring members more often, sharing short stories about how someone got started, or simply showing the variety of ages, interests, and skill levels that exist within the group.

This isn't about spotlighting for the sake of attention. It's about helping others see that this is a welcoming place—one where questions are encouraged, help is freely offered, and everyone belongs, regardless of where they are on their carving journey.

Consistency Over Volume

It's also important to say what this strategy is *not*. It is not a call to post constantly, take on more work, or pressure anyone to participate beyond what they're comfortable with. The goal for 2026 is consistency, not volume.

Small, regular efforts—shared across the year—are far more sustainable than bursts of activity followed by burnout. Whether it's a quarterly newsletter, a recurring type of social media post, or a photo shared from a meeting, the emphasis is on showing up steadily and thoughtfully.

Making Growth Visible to Members

As part of this approach, we are also interested in making the Guild's progress more visible internally. Membership growth, social media reach, and community interest are not abstract concepts—they are the result of members being willing to share their work and their time.

By occasionally sharing these milestones with the membership, we hope to close the loop between effort and outcome. When members see that a photo shared online led to new followers, or that someone discovered the Guild through Facebook or Instagram, it reinforces that these small contributions matter.

Staying True to Who We Are

Perhaps the most important part of the 2026 strategy is this: it is rooted in the character of the Guild itself. This is not about becoming louder, trendier, or more commercial. It's about being intentional, welcoming, and visible in a way that reflects the values already present in our group.

The West Wisconsin Wood Carvers Guild has always been defined by craftsmanship, patience, generosity, and community. Those qualities will continue to guide us. The strategy for 2026 simply gives us a shared lens through which to view our activities and decisions.

Looking Forward Together

As we move into the new year, there is much to look forward to: meetings, projects, learning opportunities, and time spent carving together. None of this would be possible without the members who show up month after month and year after year.

Thank you to everyone who contributed time, talent, ideas, photos, and encouragement in 2025. Your efforts made a difference. With a clear sense of direction and a strong foundation beneath us, we look forward to another good year of carving together in 2026.

Online Woodcarving Projects: A Hidden Classroom at Your Fingertips

One of the ongoing challenges for any carving club is helping members keep learning *between* meetings. We see it every month: enthusiasm is high during demos and classes, but once people go home, it can be hard to know *what to carve next* or *how to proceed on your own*.

Fortunately, there is a growing body of high-quality, free carving instruction available online. Some of these websites function almost like a virtual carving classroom—offering step-by-step project instructions, printable patterns, and technique demonstrations that can help carvers of all skill levels stay active and progressing.

Below are three particularly useful websites that many carvers may not be familiar with, but which deserve a place in every member's bookmark list.

LSIrish.com — A Treasure Trove of Free Carving Projects

If you haven't explored **LSIrish.com**, you may be surprised by just how much content is available. This site hosts a large archive of *free woodcarving projects*, many of them presented as full tutorials with photos and clear instructions.

Projects range across styles and skill levels, including:

Whittling and in-the-round carving

Relief carving panels

Animal and fish carvings

Decorative and traditional motifs

What makes this site especially valuable is that many projects include **printable patterns**, allowing you to transfer a design directly to your wood blank and begin carving immediately. For members who like to “carve along” with a teacher, these projects work very much like a self-guided class.

LSIrish is also well suited for club use. Many of the projects are small enough to be completed in a single

session, making them ideal inspiration for internal classes, beginner mentoring, or personal practice at home.

CarvingJunkies.com — Clear Patterns and Practical Tutorials

Another excellent resource is **CarvingJunkies.com**, which focuses heavily on *free carving patterns* paired with instructional content. The patterns are well laid out and easy to resize, making them especially helpful for carvers who want to adapt a design to different block sizes.

Carving Junkies offers projects in several categories:

Beginner-friendly animals and figures

Seasonal and holiday carvings

Decorative relief designs

Practice projects focused on specific skills

The site strikes a nice balance between simplicity and craftsmanship. Many of the projects are approachable for newer carvers, yet still interesting enough for more experienced members who want a quick, satisfying carve.

For mentors and teachers, this site is particularly useful because the patterns are clear and repeatable—ideal for teaching multiple students the same project at the same time.

CraftsmanSpace.com — Patterns for Chip and Relief Carving

CraftsmanSpace.com takes a slightly different approach. While it does not focus as much on step-by-step photo tutorials, it offers an extensive collection of **downloadable carving patterns**, especially for chip carving and relief carving.

These patterns are well suited for:

Practice panels

Skill-building exercises

Design inspiration for original work

For carvers who already understand basic techniques and simply need a good design to work from, CraftsmanSpace is an excellent resource. It can also be valuable for instructors looking for clean, traditional patterns to incorporate into demonstrations or classes.

Why These Resources Matter

Online resources like these don't replace in-person instruction, mentorship, or club demonstrations—but they *extend* them. They give members something concrete to work on between meetings and help maintain momentum throughout the year.

For newer carvers, these sites reduce the intimidation factor of starting a project alone. For experienced carvers, they offer fresh ideas and patterns that can spark creativity or help refine specific techniques.

As a guild, we can also use these resources strategically:

Suggest projects as optional “homework” between meetings

Use patterns as the basis for short internal classes

Share links with new members who want to practice at home

Encourage mentors and mentees to carve the same project together

A Tool Worth Sharing

One of the strengths of our carving community is our willingness to share knowledge. These websites represent that same spirit—carvers teaching carvers, freely and generously.

If you haven't explored them yet, take some time to browse, download a pattern, and give one of the projects a try. You may find that the next great carving session starts not at a meeting, but at your workbench at home—with a little help from the wider carving community online.

Top YouTube Channels for Woodcarving Instruction

YouTube has become one of the best free resources for visual, step-by-step carving instruction — especially for beginners and intermediate carvers who want to **see techniques in action** before trying them themselves.

Here are *five channels worth exploring*:

1. Woodcarving Workshops (Chris Pye)

Master carver **Chris Pye** has decades of teaching experience, and his YouTube channel publishes *high-quality instructional videos* that walk learners through fundamentals like tool use, sharpening, and full projects. It grew out of his long-running **WoodcarvingWorkshops.tv** platform, now freely available on YouTube. **Best for:** Traditional woodcarving techniques, hand tool basics, orderly project lessons.

2. Gene Messer

One of the *earliest woodcarvers on YouTube*, Gene Messer's videos focus on **knife carving and simple projects**, with clear, repeat-friendly instruction — ideal if you're just starting or want approachable whittling lessons. Messer is frequently recommended by carvers learning from online videos. **Best for:** Beginner knife carvers and whittling projects.

3. Doug Linker

Doug Linker's channel offers **friendly, relaxed tutorials** covering various carving projects, often using affordable materials. Fellow carvers often praise his clear explanations, especially for beginners moving beyond basic shapes. **Best for:** Beginners wanting fun, practical carving lessons and self-paced learning.

4. “Carving Is Fun”

This channel (and like-named community) posts **step-by-step video guides** for specific carving projects — especially smaller decorative pieces and ornaments. It's been mentioned by new carvers as a good introductory resource to see the progression of a carve from blank to finished piece. **Best for:** Carving small projects and following the entire

process visually.

5. BeaverCraft (Wood Carving & Tools)

BeaverCraft’s channel blends tool demos with carving tutorials, including **ASMR style no-talk videos** and guided beginner lessons. While not strictly “full lesson courses,” it’s a great visual supplement to hands-on practice, and their projects (like simple spoon carving) are useful for new carvers. **Best for:** Tool demos, inspiration, and relaxing carving visuals.

Bonus Suggestions

Here are additional channels mentioned by carvers in forums that are worth checking out:

SharonMyART – Detailed step-by-step carving lessons (especially figurative work)

Cousin Jack Carves – Great for festive and project-based videos

Alec LaCase / UP Wood Art – Focus on faces and detailed shaping techniques

Tips for Members

Start with basics: Watching a beginner tutorial before your next project can help solidify techniques before you pick up tools.

Combine resources: Pair a video lesson with the written patterns on sites like LSIrish.com — suddenly you have *visual instruction + printable pattern + your tools!*

Create a watch party: Consider showcasing a technique video at a meeting or workshop and discuss what members learned.

Building Our Story: A Social Media Strategy That Works

Over the past several months, the West Wisconsin Wood Carvers Guild has been experimenting with a more intentional approach to social media. Rather than posting occasionally or promoting only events, we have been developing themed “media blitzes”—short, focused campaigns designed to tell a clear story about who we are and why someone might want to join us.

The results have been encouraging. We are seeing more engagement, more conversations, and—most importantly—new faces walking through the door.

But the real success isn’t just in the numbers. It’s in the clarity of the message we are putting out into the community.

From Invitations to Identity

Our earlier themes, such as “*Let’s Carve*” and “*Everyone Starts Somewhere*,” served an important purpose. They lowered the barrier to entry. They told people, “You can try this,” and “You don’t need to be experienced to belong here.”

Those messages matter. For many people, the hardest part of starting a new hobby is simply believing they are allowed to begin.

More recently, our March campaign, “*Better Together*,” expanded that message. It showed that our guild is not just a place to start—it is a place to stay. By highlighting the social side of carving—shared

benches, conversations, mentorship—we began to present a fuller picture of what makes this group special.

In other words, we moved from invitation to identity.

The Next Step: Learn by Doing

Looking ahead to May, we are planning to build on that foundation with a new theme: “*Learn by Doing.*”

This theme answers a different, but equally important, question:

“How do I actually learn this?”

Many people are interested in woodcarving. They may have watched videos, read articles, or even bought a few tools. But there is often a gap between interest and action. That gap is uncertainty—uncertainty about where to begin, what to do, and whether they will succeed.

“Learn by Doing” addresses that directly.

It emphasizes that carving is not something you master by watching or reading alone. It is something you learn by picking up a knife, making a cut, adjusting, and trying again. And perhaps most importantly, it reinforces that this process happens more naturally—and more successfully—when done alongside others.

How the Themes Work Together

One of the strengths of this approach is that each campaign builds on the last. Rather than repeating the same message, we are gradually telling a more complete story:

Let’s Carve — Come try this

Everyone Starts Somewhere — It’s okay to be new

Better Together — You don’t have to do it alone

Learn by Doing — This is how you actually improve

Each theme answers a question that a potential member might have. Taken together, they form a clear and welcoming path from curiosity to participation.

Staying True to Our Brand

Throughout all of this, one thing has remained consistent: our voice.

We are not trying to present ourselves as a formal school or an elite group of experts. Our tone is friendly, practical, and grounded in real experience. We show real people, real projects, and real progress—often unfinished, sometimes imperfect, but always genuine.

That consistency is important. It ensures that what people see online matches what they experience when they walk into a meeting.

A simple guideline has helped shape every post:

Would a beginner feel welcome?

Would an experienced carver feel respected?

If the answer to both is yes, then we are on the right track.

More Than Promotion

It is worth noting that this strategy is not just about attracting new members—though it is doing that. It is also about strengthening our identity as a guild.

When we consistently show:

people carving together

knowledge being shared

progress at all skill levels

We reinforce what we value. We remind ourselves, as much as anyone else, what makes this group worth being part of.

Looking Ahead

As we continue through the year, we can build on this approach with additional themes such as “*Carving Traditions*” and “*Carving for Life*,” each highlighting a different aspect of the craft and the community.

But the foundation is already in place.

We are no longer just posting updates—we are telling a story. A story about a craft that is learned by doing, improved by sharing, and sustained by the people who gather around the table.

And that, more than anything, is what makes it worth being part of.

A Simple Path for Teaching Beginners

What Mentors Should Emphasize in the New WWWCG Novice Curriculum



One of the strengths of the West Wisconsin Wood Carvers Guild has always been the willingness of experienced carvers to help beginners. Most of us learned because someone took the time to show us how to hold a knife, read the grain, or recover from a mistake. Over time, however, we realized that beginners can sometimes feel unsure about what they should be learning first, and mentors may not always share the same mental roadmap for guiding them.

To address this, the Education Committee has been working on a very simple, flexible *novice curriculum*. It is not a class schedule, a checklist, or a rigid program. Instead, it is a shared framework that helps mentors emphasize what matters most at each stage of a beginner’s journey. The goal is confidence, safety, and enjoyment, not speed or perfection.

The curriculum has just three steps.

Step 1: Introduction to Wood Carving

Safety, tools, and fundamentals

For mentors, the most important responsibility at this stage is **safety and comfort**. Beginners are often nervous. They worry about cutting themselves, ruining the wood, or “doing it wrong.” Your role is to help them feel safe and welcome at the bench.

Key points to emphasize include safe hand positions, cut direction, and awareness of where the knife will go if it slips. Good habits formed early prevent injuries later. Tool handling is equally important: proper knife grip, controlled cuts, and basic edge awareness. Tool care should be introduced gently. Beginners do not need a deep dive into sharpening theory, but they should understand stropping, why sharp tools are safer, and how to treat tools with respect.

Equally important is helping new members get comfortable with the Guild itself. Show them where things are, introduce them to others, and reassure them that mistakes are normal and expected. At this stage, mentors should emphasize encouragement over correction. Confidence comes first.

Step 2: Whittling — Learning the Knife and the Wood

Hands-on skill building

Whittling is the heart of beginner learning. It teaches how a knife behaves in wood without the pressure of complex forms or fine detail. For mentors, the emphasis here should be on **control and feel**, not on finished appearance.

This is where beginners learn basic whittling cuts, depth control, and how to work with the grain instead of fighting it. Repetition is valuable. Let them make similar cuts over and over. Help them notice how different woods respond, how grain direction changes, and how lighter cuts often lead to better results.

Mentors should watch for developing habits: grip tension, awkward hand positions, or carving against the grain. Corrections should be gentle and timely. A short demonstration followed by hands-on practice is often more effective than a long explanation.

Most importantly, remind beginners that whittling is not “lesser” carving. It is foundational. Mastering the knife through simple work prepares them for every other carving discipline they may choose later.

Step 3: Further Adventures in Wood Carving

Exploration and growth

Once beginners are comfortable with basic knife skills, it is time to let curiosity lead. This stage is about **exploration**, not commitment. Some will be drawn to carving in the round, others to relief, chip carving, woodburning, fan birds, or painting. There is no “correct” path.

Mentors play an important role by introducing possibilities without pushing a particular discipline. Short demonstrations, conversations, and invitations to observe experienced carvers are often enough. Encourage beginners to try small projects beyond basic whittling and to ask questions freely.

This is also where mentors can begin to step back slightly. Allow beginners to make more decisions on their own, plan small projects, and learn from minor mistakes. Growth comes from doing, not being directed at every step.

Guiding Principles for Mentors

Across all three steps, a few principles matter more than any technique:

Safety always comes first.

Progress matters more than perfection.

Everyone learns at a different pace.

Mentoring is supportive, not rigid.

In-person carving is central; online resources are supplemental.

This curriculum exists to give mentors a shared focus, not to limit how you teach. Your experience, patience, and enthusiasm remain the most important teaching tools we have. By emphasizing safety, confidence, and enjoyment at each stage, we help beginners become skilled, independent carvers who will one day mentor others in turn.

That is how the Guild grows — one welcoming bench at a time.