

Why Us

It was disappointing that our last meeting was cancelled due to an inaccurate weather forecast. A wintry mix was a certainty, until it wasn't. And, while cloudy, it remained dry throughout the day. Personally, as the guy who made the call about not having the meeting, I can't remember another weekend when I actually hoped that it would rain or snow. I'm sure that many were disappointed. The planned wood harvest would've been a marked departure from the usual format of our meetings. But the wood will be there for us at a later date. And we have other meetings and events coming up that will keep us on our feet.

The gap in the schedule, plus some vacation time recently spent in New Mexico, California, and Colorado, has given me a little time to think about the topic of this column. Not "Why Us?" as is typically asked when we face misfortune. But "Why Us." as a reflection on the purposes and value of our club. I find it useful to think about what we're here for and what, as a club, we should strive to accomplish.

First, I believe that the principal reason for our club to exist is to serve our interests as individual members - specifically to enhance our personal satisfaction with turning by helping us to master new skills and increase our enjoyment and appreciation of what we each make - whether that's a pen, a candlestick, a platter or an abstract form. No matter the level where we start, the club is here to help us improve and help us experience growing satisfaction with what we do every time we, as individuals, stand at the lathe. It is therefore an educational tool making us, collectively, both educators and students.

Second, the club is a way that we, as a group, contribute to the cultural life of our community by entertaining, inspiring, and educating non-turners through demos and presentations; and also by simply showing the remarkable objects that we make. These activities draw people to our parks, fairs, festivals, historic mansions, and galleries. It's always amazing to appreciate in real time the pleasure experienced by viewers that crowd around the lathe and their fascination as useful, playful, and beautiful objects are quickly shaped from raw blocks of wood. And though our turned creations that sit on pedestals throughout a gallery show don't provide us the same immediate feedback, they provide an equally important but more contemplative aesthetic experience for viewers. And they contribute along with paintings, photographs, ceramics and other media to the message that the visual arts are important to the broad cultural life of not just Annapolis or Anne Arundel and Prince Georges Counties, but the entire Mid-Atlantic region.

Third, individually and as a group, we are part of a burgeoning national and international movement to preserve and advance craftsmanship. This comes at a time when people are too often given choices of only mass produced stuff, and are increasingly unable to make or fix the tools that we rely upon for our day to day survival. As turners, craftsmen, and artists, we both demonstrate and remind others of our human ability to make things -- and to transform wood, something once magnificent in nature, into objects that are both functional and beautiful.

So "Why us". My belief is that we offer a path to personal fulfillment unlike many of the careers we have or have had before turning became a part of our lives. And that we have much to contribute to

enrich the lives of others. These are wonderful opportunities. And they are readily available. To borrow a phrase from American Express, "Membership has its privileges". Rich