

ShopTalk

Greenville Woodworkers Guild



February 2022



Piano Table built for Stevie Wonder

February's meeting will feature another amazing woodworker. George Wurtzel has been blind since he was two years old. He builds one-of-a-kind pieces and one of his designs has sold over 1 million units. He was commissioned to build the custom coffee table above for Stevie Wonder.

Poor vision; great passion
“You’ve got to follow your passion in life regardless of the obstacles in your way,” George says. “Never allow someone who doesn’t have to pay the consequences dictate the consequences of your life.”

George started life with poor vision and it deteriorated from there. But that never kept him from working with his hands. His grandfather, a carpenter and cabinetmaker, introduced George to woodworking. His father, an excavator, introduced him to mechanics. “Most kids had swing-sets in their backyards. We had backhoes, cranes and a thousand acres to play on.” But his mother, who grew up on a farm and was extremely creative, was the one who taught George that he could make anything. “On a farm you grow up learning how to do stuff—and she knew how to do stuff. It rubbed off on me.”

After deciding to become a mechanic, George worked in Volkswagen and bicycle repair shops. But he didn’t like getting greasy, so he turned to woodworking. “Being the stubborn cuss I am, I just started building stuff,” he explains. “I built a few pieces of lawn furniture and put them outside. Within a month I got an order for a hundred chairs. I put a radial arm saw and a jointer on my brother’s charge card and I was in business.”

Business boomed for nine years. George’s shop expanded to 5000 square feet and eight employees. During this time, he built a piano-shaped coffee table. A one-third-scale model of a Steinway & Sons Model D concert grand, it was presented to Stevie Wonder—

George’s former classmate—as an outstanding achievement award. But when interest rates soared and the economy crumbled in 1982, so did George’s fortunes. He lost his shop, house and livelihood before deciding to relocate from Michigan to North Carolina. “You know you’re not doing so well when you can move everything you own on a Greyhound bus,” he recalls. George applied for and was accepted into the Catawba Valley Community College Furniture Production Management program. The entry process was not without incident. “I walked into the admissions office with my white cane and the first thing the guy said was ‘We have a problem.’ I said, ‘Who’s we?’ He said ‘You’re blind.’ I replied, ‘I noticed when we shook hands that you were missing two fingers.’ He explained he’d lost them in a woodworking accident. I told him that all I was looking for was the same opportunity to cut off my fingers that he’d had, and I got in!”

While finishing his course work George was hired to set up a cabinet-manufacturing shop. He designed the space, bought and set up all the machinery, and wound up managing the facility, which produced up to eight kitchens per week.

A few years later he went back into business on his own, naming his new company SellAmerica. “I wasn’t sure what I was going to make, so I figured a name like that would allow me to sell anything,” he says. George designed a triangular display box for veteran interment flags and established accounts with 2500 funeral homes and the armed forces. He eventually sold the company and spent the proceeds on “drugs, sex and rock and

roll—and the rest foolishly.” For a while he dabbled in raising horses, worked in a bakery and ran a camp for blind kids.

In 2009 George moved to Minneapolis to work as an industrial arts teacher for an organization called Blindness Learning in New Dimensions (BLIND). He enjoyed working with students facing the same challenges he had faced. “But you know,” he explains, “when you work by yourself for a long time, you like to do things your own way.” In 2011, he again dove headlong back into the furniture-building business, this time concentrating on a line of puzzle furniture. Designing without erasers George’s puzzle furniture is based on the interlocking wood puzzles his grandfather made for him when he was a child. The furniture has a Craftsman-style look and feel. Designed for people living an “urban, nomadic lifestyle,” it can be easily assembled, disassembled and moved. Each piece is held together with a single fastener—a hidden thumbscrew. George has applied the basic design to create coffee, end and dining tables, as well as bookshelves and a laptop desk that adjusts for standing or sitting. The joinery is complex and precise. As with all of his pieces, George designed everything in his head. “Good design can be felt, not just seen,” he explains. When asked about the challenges of designing cerebrally rather than on paper, George says, “Creativity doesn’t come out of your eyeballs; it comes out of your head. Some people are blessed with the ability to sing, some with playing baseball. I’ve been blessed with the ability to see everything in my mind’s eye. When I’m designing something I can look at it from every angle

by rotating it, using my brain's built-in computer mouse." George maintains most people design with a pencil because there's an eraser on one end. "My eraser is the scrap bin," he jokes.

Working in darkness

George's shop looks like any other woodworking shop. It sports a drill press, miter saw, bandsaw, half a dozen routers and stacks of wood. A huge lathe—large enough to turn porch posts—occupies one corner. As George lives in an older part of Minneapolis, he's recently found a niche reproducing architectural millwork. He turns delicate sculptural vases and bowls on the same lathe.

A massive Felder multi-machine that incorporates a shaper, jointer, planer and rolling-table saw occupies the center of George's shop.

The one tool that might look foreign to most woodworkers is the small "click ruler" that George keeps in his back pocket. The heart of this device is a 12" long 16tpi threaded rod with one side flattened and scribed in 1/2" increments. This rod slides inside a tube that has a stop at one end and a spring-loaded ball bearing located precisely 6" away. Each time the ball bearing engages the next thread, it clicks—indicating a 1/16" change in dimension. By engaging the stop and adding together the 6" fixed dimension, the number of exposed 1/2" scribe marks and the audible clicks, this ruler measures up to 12" in 1/16" increments. Screwing on additional threaded rods extends the tool's capacity in 12" increments. To measure in 1/64" increments, George uses a "roto" ruler, which is based on the same threaded rod. This ruler simply has an adjustable

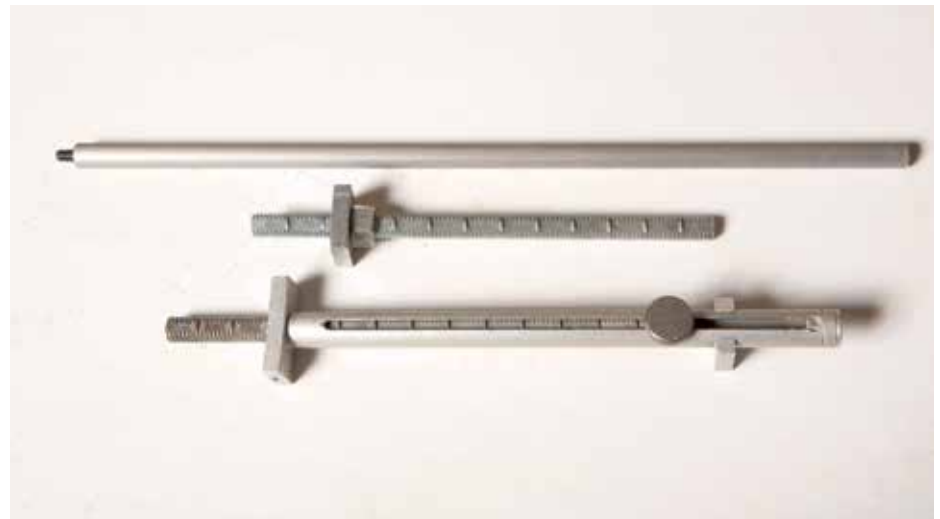
nut with a square head. Each quarter turn of the nut measures 1/64". George uses a scribe for marking, rather than a pencil, so he can feel the lines. Two other tools he's fond of are the audio-output tape measure that he uses for rough measurements and the push-button remote that allows him to control his dust-collection system from any place in the shop.

George doesn't use a blade guard on his tablesaw. Because he works primarily by feel, the guard continuously gets in the way. Yet, after 40 years of woodworking he still has 9-7/8ths of his fingers; he nipped one while doing a repetitive task at the end of a day. We've all been there.

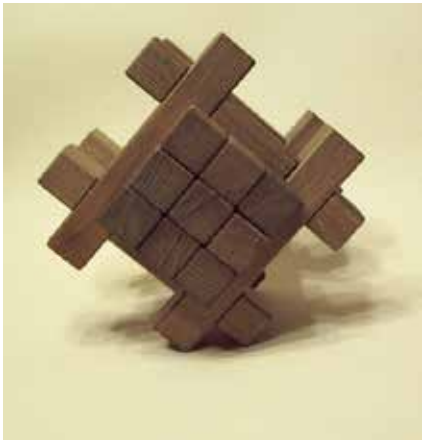
As a person who "sees" with his fingertips, George doesn't understand people who focus on how a

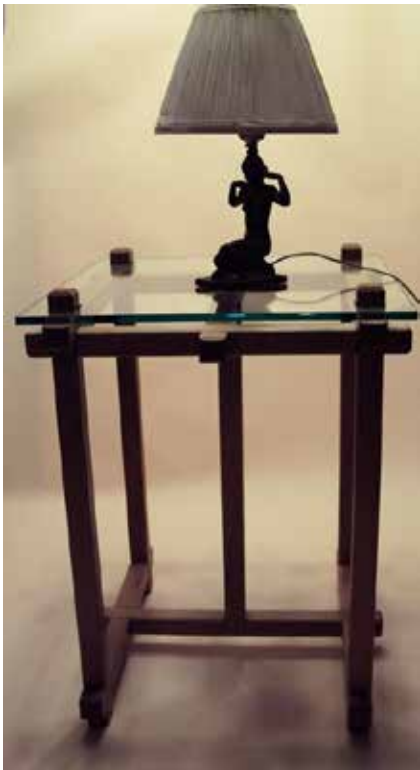
piece of furniture looks and ignore how it feels. When it comes to sanding and finishing, he's a perfectionist. "Don't be in a hurry," he explains, and then adds—with a twinkle in his eye, "If it's worth the effort to build it, it's worth the effort to sand it."

Some people feel a piece of furniture or wood art should stand aesthetically on its own; others feel a greater appreciation can be gained by understanding the era in which it was created or knowing who created it. George's furniture and turnings surely stand on their own, but knowing the man—and his story—makes them even more special. And yes, George's eyes do twinkle.











Joe Boyd
President



T H E P R E S I D E N T S C O R N E R

The year 2021 has been a wonderful year for the guild in spite of the setbacks from the pandemic. From the countless hours of mentoring, the wonderful celebration of our 40th anniversary with Roy Underhill, the publishing of the guild's book *Going With The Grain*, authored by our own Aubrey Rogers, to the Christmas celebration dinner, we have truly had an extraordinary year. While our membership has steadily increased month over month, our financial health remains strong and we are excited about the upcoming year.

To highlight the health of the guild, at our next monthly membership meeting scheduled for February 7, 2022, I would like to share with you "The State of The Guild". I will have several key individuals give a short report highlighting our growth, the financial health, charitable activities and operational

enhancements. Each month during the Board of Director's meeting, we systematically go through these important areas of our guild. I believe you will find it helpful to hear of our progress and plans by way of this State of the Guild address.

Also at our meeting we will welcome to the stage, for the very first time, George Wurtzel. This will be an event that you simply DO NOT WANT TO MISS! I encourage you all to peruse George's website www.gmwurtzel.com. As you read about him and look at some of his impressive work you might find it interesting that a significant fact about George is difficult to pick up on....George is blind. George is blind but produces incredible pieces of woodwork that are highly prized. Please plan to join us for this special meeting. There is also the likelihood that he will be doing some woodturning on the lathe at the meeting. As we expect the audito-

rium to be filled and In order to insure that we have adequate seating, in the coming days you will see an email requesting that you sign-up indicating your attendance to this meeting. At that time you may log on to the GWG website and sign up to attend this very special event. Attendance is of course free and we are doing this so that we may be prepared for a larger attendance of guild members. As the guild is an all volunteer organization, please look for ways that you can contribute to the continued success of our guild. It is a wonderful organization full of wonderful people. Until we see each other next, please enjoy your guild.

Joe Boyd

GWG NEW MEMBERS

- Charles Anthony Greenville, SC
- Adler Armstrong..... Simpsonville, SC
- Jacob Blakely..... Greenville, SC
- Damon Christenbury Greenville, SC
- Jerry Clark..... Liberty, SC
- Henry Cox Spartanburg, SC
- Cary Cupka Greenville, SC
- Michael Danekas Simpsonville, SC
- Karl Deily Greenville, SC
- Dallas Dunn Greenville, SC
- John Fisher Mauldin, SC
- John Giglio..... Taylors, SC
- Barbara Gillam..... Greenville, SC
- Diane Gluck..... Greenville, SC
- Wes Gregory..... Greenville, SC
- Carrie Grimard..... Taylors, SC
- Cliff Heitz..... Simpsonville, SC
- Hugo Hernandez Greenville, SC
- Will Hinkley Piedmont, SC
- Randy Jacobs..... Greenville, SC
- Lisa Kistler Greenville, SC
- Thad Morgan Greenville, SC
- Gina O'Donnell..... Greenville, SC
- Jenks Patrick Greenville, SC
- Maryanne Phillips..... Easley, SC
- Tom Powers..... Simpsonville, SC
- Don Reynolds..... Greenville, SC
- Andrew Ross Greenville, SC
- Samuel Stanton Simpsonville, SC
- Earl Switzer Anderson, SC
- Andrew Wactor Greer, SC
- Breck Warne Greenville, SC



What is a Dad Joke? According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, a dad joke is a wholesome joke of the type said to be told by fathers with a punchline that is often an obvious or predictable pun or play on words and usually judged to be endearingly corny or unfunny.

Here goes.....

Question: Where do woodworkers go to school?

Answer: You will find the answer hidden in the newsletter.



Aubrey Rogers was available at our January meeting for a book signing and recognized by Guild President Joe Boyd for writing and producing the Guild's history.

GWG members may pick up your free copy of the Guild's History. See the Supervisor on duty.



Left to Right: Joe Boyd, Van Matthews, Richard Mackintosh

Richard Mackintosh is stepping down from his passion of leading the youth program due to health issues. He received a plaque of appreciation from President Joe Boyd and a segmented bowl turned by Van Matthews. Thanks for all your good work Richard!



Ken Fissel headed a group of new members who built more LOW-BOY carts for project storage. The Shop now has 12 of these carts for members to use to store their projects until finished. The carts are to be stored in the back of the Auditorium. Dad Joke answer: (To “boarding” school.)

The members who built the carts are:

- Robert Cook
- Patrick Dreiding
- David Duff
- Martinez Durant
- Marina Gill
- James Koch
- John Smith
- James Tetor

G W G A C T I V I T Y R E P O R T

CHARITABLE PROJECTS / December 1 to December 31 , 2021

	Hours
Beads of Courage.....	5
Meyer Center.....	30
Other Charitable Projects.....	7.5
Total.....	38

MENTORING CLASSES / December 1 to December 31 , 2021

	Hours
Combined total hours for adult classes.....	139.5
Youth Classes	61.5
Total.....	201

GUILD HISTORY

Aubrey Rogers

Part 18

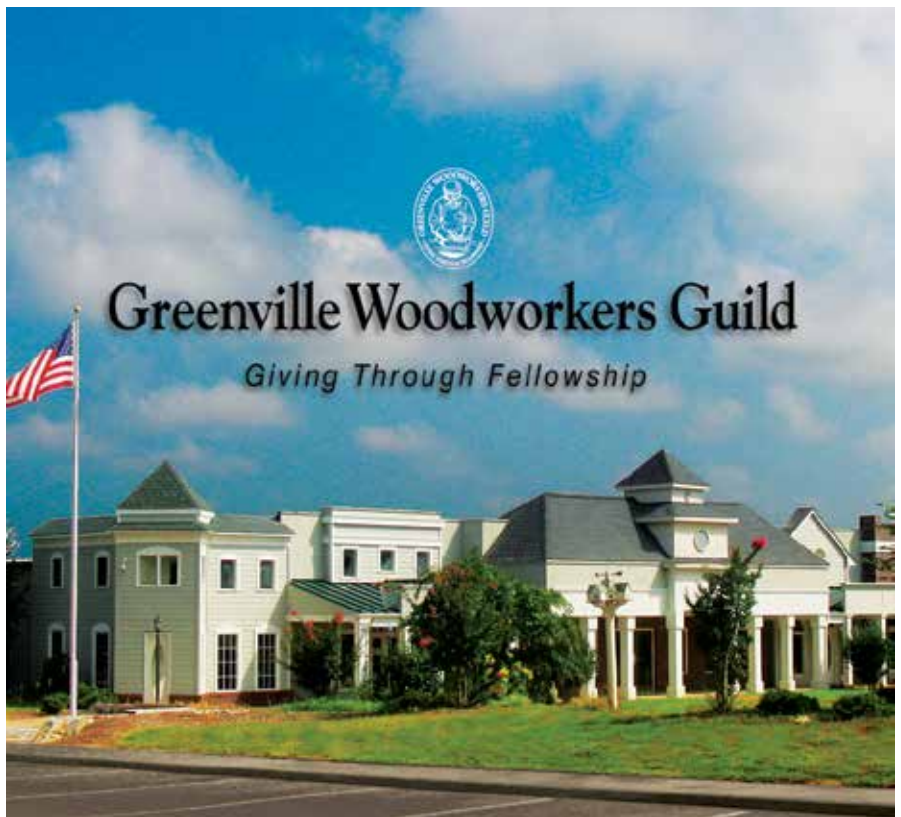
January 1985

Officers included Bob Ripley- President, JIM Beard-Vice President and Newsletter, Ravenel Scott-Secretary / Treasurer, and David Reid and Larry Williams programs.

The December meeting featured Max Cline from Saluda, N.C. displaying portions of his collection of exotic wood in turned challises. He displayed 150 at the meeting from a collection of over six thousand. Mr. Cline is a retired chemical engineer and secretary of the International Wood Collectors Society.

The meeting will start at seven, at David Reid's shop, the shop opens at six thirty for a social period. Pat, from Huntersville Hardwoods will cover hardwood and plywood grading.

Susanne Abrams shared information on the location of Piedmont Skills, a Group of adult handicapped members who do wood stripping in their workshop. Carlyle McKaughan shared a tip on table saw inserts. If you find that it is difficult to make a good



square cut on your table saw, check the insert, it may not be flat. You can correct this problem by placing a full sheet of sandpaper on a flat surface and rub the face side of the insert on the sandpaper. Any imperfections will soon show up. Bad dents or bends may require peening or other corrections, otherwise the small unevenness can be removed by continued sanding. Finish with a fine grit sandpaper.

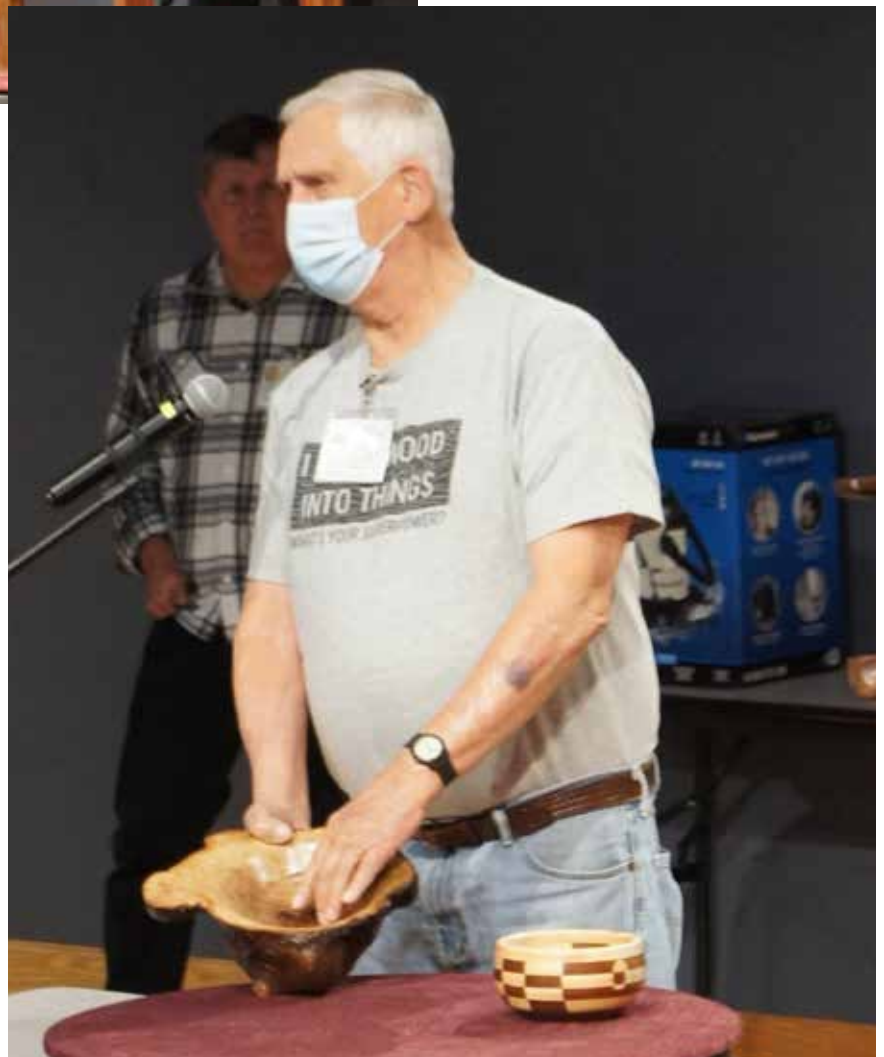
Ravenel Scott will be bringing his

doll house for show and tell, you do not want to miss it!



Maloof style low back dining chair
by Bobby Hartness

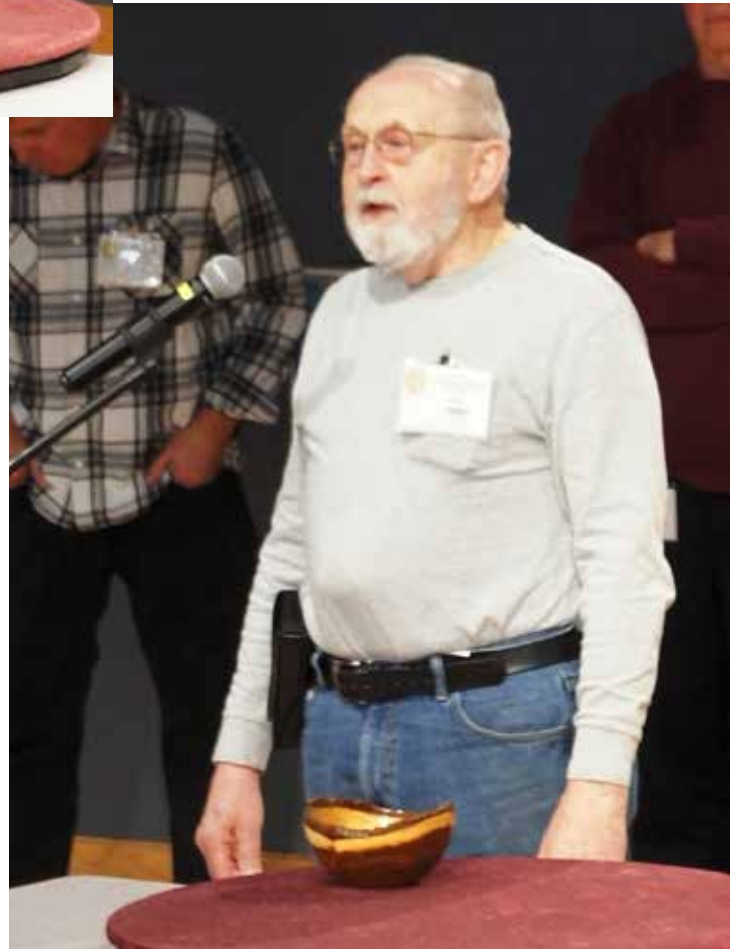
Turnings by Jim Kilton





Z-table
by Tom Auth

Turning by Dave Paul





Segmented turned bowl
by Van Matthews

Turned and painted bowls
by Steve Estabrooks



2021- 2022 Officers

Joe Boyd - President

John Arnold - Executive VP

Bill Fuller - Treasurer

Chuck Graham - Secretary

David Dewease - Vice President, Communications

Van Matthews - VP of Fund Raising

Doyle Hogsed - Vice President, Educational Activities

Marion DeWitt - Vice President Charitable Projects

Aaron Galloway - Guild Accountant

Dick Best - Education Center Superintendent

Mac Bowman - Shop Manager

Robert Tepper - At Large

Jon Rauschenbach - At Large

Al Socha - At Large

Bill Gay - Accountant Emeritus



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www.greenvillewoodworkers.com