

JOE RUMINSKI

AAW 2016 HONORARY LIFETIME MEMBER

Larry Miller

Every year, the AAW awards the distinction of Honorary Lifetime Member to someone who has contributed significantly to the field of woodturning. This year, that award goes to Joe Ruminski of Fairview, North Carolina.

Joe started his woodturning journey at the young age of thirteen. His father had an auto-body shop in which he had a big green Powermatic lathe acquired from a school auction in 1963. Although Joe had no instruction in woodturning, his dad knew turners were using old files to make scrapers for turning wood, so that's what he used. One of his first real projects was making a spinning wheel, during which he says 80-grit abrasive

was his best friend. He turned wood a lot until, as he says, "girls, work, and college took most of my time—and probably in that order."

From educator to turner

Joe graduated from Warren Wilson College with a bachelor's degree in education and became an elementary school teacher, primarily because, as he puts it, "I wanted most of the kids shorter than me." After going back to school at Western Carolina University for evening classes, he obtained advanced degrees in education and administration. He worked in the same school system as a principal for the next twenty years, and after thirty years in the system was able to retire.

While anticipating and preparing for retirement, Joe took a woodturning class at John C. Campbell Folk School with Bobby Clemons as the instructor and Nick Cook as his assistant. One class was all it took to hook him again into spinning wood for fun. He was particularly impressed with the improvement in tools since his days of using old files for scrapers. His next big step along the journey of becoming the expert turner he is today occurred in 2000, when he joined the Carolina Mountain



Joe Ruminski, AAW's 2016 Honorary Lifetime Member

Woodturners (CMW), where several members mentored him in safe and proper tool technique.

Joe developed his woodturning skills by attending more than seventy seminars and studying with craftsmen such as Ray Key, Mike Mahoney, Gary Sanders, Nick Cook, and Bobby Clemons. In addition to the formal training, he honed his skills by producing more than 800 natural-edge bowls, utilitarian bowls, vases, Christmas ornaments, and other art pieces. His work appears in several prestigious places, including the Biltmore Estate and numerous galleries in Western North Carolina.

From turner to teacher

In 2003, Joe had an opportunity to teach a weekend class at the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts as a fill-in instructor, which he found to be the perfect match for his interests—turning and teaching. Later



Spinning, 2011, Maple, manzanita root, 6" x 4½" (15cm x 11cm)

that same year, he was accepted into The Southern Highland Craft Guild. His first big commercial turning job was to make more than 750 pieces for the Biltmore Estate Company. This single job taught him three important things: 1) how to make really clean cuts, 2) how to develop a production mode of turning, and 3) the knowledge that he didn't want to do that kind of work again.

Joe is now a regular instructor at John C. Campbell and Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts. He has opened a classroom area in his own studio, with classes available for private and semiprivate instruction. His students quickly gain skill sets that would otherwise take years to acquire, and he always receives stellar reviews. As an instructor, Joe says the biggest reward comes from seeing people he has taught doing things beyond anything he has ever done. He has taught all around the United States.

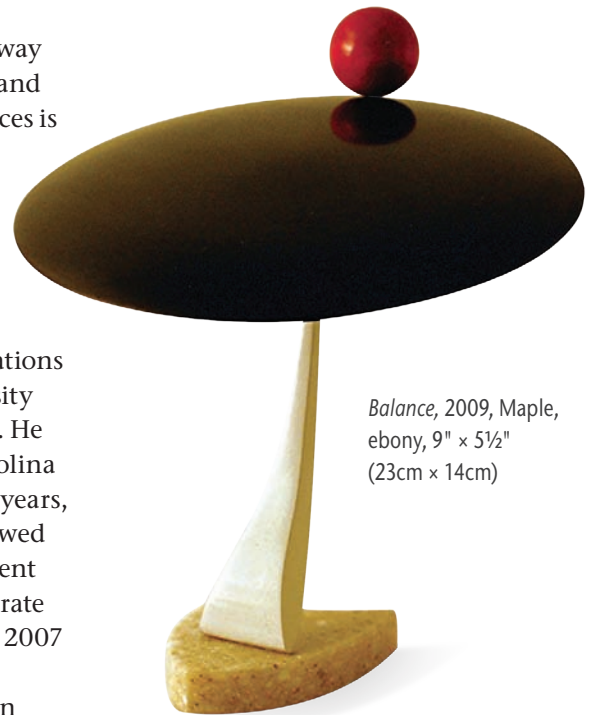
Joe describes his current work in woodturning to be about the technical aspect of how to turn well and safely. In his sculptural pieces, his goal is to use line and form in a way that allows the viewer to use his or her imagination to create a description of the art, while his utilitarian pieces show the

natural beauty of the wood in a way that makes them both practical and artful. The goal in all of Joe's pieces is to keep the lines simple so they accent the natural beauty of the wood.

An active contributor

Joe Ruminski has always been a doer, and woodturning organizations have benefited from his propensity to do whatever needs to be done. He was a board member for the Carolina Mountain Woodturners for two years, starting the year he joined, followed by stints as secretary, vice president for two years, and then two separate duties as president of the club in 2007 and 2015.

Joe became an AAW member in 2001. He started working with the AAW Youth Program in 2008 by teaching a couple of classes in Richmond, Virginia, after which he became a member of the Youth Program committee under the leadership of Bonnie Klein. After teaching youth classes for a couple of years, Bonnie stepped down from the chair position and Joe stepped in to fill that role until 2015. Other duties with the AAW have included: turning the special awards for the past seven years, working with



Balance, 2009, Maple, ebony, 9" x 5½" (23cm x 14cm)

the EOG auction for the past eight years, serving one year on the AAW board nominating committee, and helping get the Light House for the Blind and the Veteran turning sessions started at the annual AAW Symposia.

Testimonials

Joe has made a lot of friends and supporters during his time in woodturning, and a recognition article wouldn't be complete without some input from ▶



Joe Ruminski in his element: teaching youth at an AAW Symposium.

Photo: Andi Wolfe



Joe with a blind woodturner at a Lighthouse for the Blind AAW Symposium session.

Photo: Andi Wolfe



Tear Drops, 2008, Dyed ash, each about 5" x 3"
(13cm x 8cm)



Formal Ball, 2012, Maple, cherry,
14" x 4" (36cm x 10cm)

them. Greg Schramek, President of the AAW's board of directors, has known Joe for about ten years. Greg states that not only is Joe a true professional, taking pride in what he does to achieve the highest quality, but he is also one of the hardest workers Greg knows—yet is reluctant to take his share of recognition. Greg further reports that Joe wasn't born with a silver spoon and will find a cheaper way to make a tool, rather than buy one. Not only will he make a tool himself when possible, but, more importantly, he will also pass the knowledge on to others.

Another long-term woodturning friend, John Hill, emphasizes the "get 'er done" attitude Joe possesses by relating the CMW objective of creating a woodturning learning center back in 2005. The center consisted of eleven mini lathes with all the accessories, along with a utility trailer to travel and teach woodturning classes at schools, retirement homes, other woodworking clubs, the state fair, and other venues. John says Joe was instrumental in making this chapter effort a success.

I have worked on the AAW Symposium Youth Program with Joe for all the years he has been involved and can cite many instances where his support was instrumental in solving problems and making the program a success. Along with his get-it-done personality, Joe never lets his ego get in the way. He'll do whatever is needed—recruiting and organizing the youth instructors, teaching multiple sessions, or doing the grunt work to help the annual program run smoothly.

Although Joe's best friend, his dog Carson, can't talk, he has expressed his admiration for Joe by his actions. Joe's wife Carol told me Carson doesn't like for Joe to leave him behind. Before one of Joe's trips for a woodturning demonstration, he was packing what he needed and checking things off his list. As he put an item in the box, he noticed a glue bottle was missing.

Thinking he checked it off without actually putting it in, he got another one. Then he noticed some wood pieces were also missing from the box and he couldn't remember where he'd put them. Carol discovered the problem—and brought the glue bottle and slightly chewed wood back into the house and asked Joe if these were what he was looking for. Carson, not wanting Joe to leave, was removing things from the box as fast as he could and taking them outside when Joe wasn't looking. They report that Carson still doesn't get to go on Joe's trips, but he appears to be more accepting of Joe's absences. Either that or Joe has gotten more vigilant.

In Joe's own words, "None of [my woodturning experiences] would have been possible if it had not been for a very supportive wife and family." Carol is a very talented quilter and a fantastic cookie maker. They are celebrating their 45th wedding anniversary this year, and Joe states, "It's hard for me to believe she has put up with me all this time," noting an instance when he and Carson tracked wood shavings all over the recently cleaned house Carol had prepared for evening guests.

Joe and Carol have two grown sons, of whom they are very proud. Their older, Chris, is a glass artist and their younger, Jeff, is a commercial graphic artist. Joe and Carol have three wonderful grandchildren, Jerica, Katie, and Eli.

Greg Schramek's words provide a fitting final statement: "If AAW had a pedestal, I believe Joe should be placed on it. After all, he's only five foot, four inches, but based on his contribution to woodturning and the AAW, he stands high above most of us." Congratulations to Joe Ruminski on this well-deserved recognition award. ■

Larry Miller is a member of the Woodturners of Olympia in Washington. He has been active in the AAW Symposium Youth Program since 2007 as an instructor and coordinator.