

Workshops and Other Venues: Why Bother?

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Why bother with workshops, seminars, demonstrations, or other types of educational venues? These venues are offered on a variety of subjects, some at no charge, some for small fees, and others that some may consider expensive. The sharing of information is the primary purpose, but what do you get out of it? Why should you take the time out of your busy schedule? Why attend when you can rent videos, DVD's, or read books for a whole lot less? Let's explore this and see if it is worth your while.

I have been turning for a little over three years. But, eight years ago I decided to purchase the best woodturning lathe that Harbor Freight sold for \$299.00. It was a 12" x 36" cast iron bed with a half horsepower motor, and all the attachments including the stand. One of the features I liked was the swing out attachment for the tool rest that would allow more freedom for positioning around a piece. The other feature I liked was that it had a Reeves Pulley that allowed for variable speeds by swinging a lever handle while the lathe was running. I am rather impatient when it comes to converting tools for other purposes and this feature was a definite plus to not have to change belt positions for the desired speed. I also purchased the eight piece set of high speed steel turning tools available from Harbor Freight that were made in China. It included a couple of roughing gouges, a couple of skewers, a spindle gouge, a couple of scrapers, and a parting tool for about \$35.00. A pretty cheap in-

vestment that I felt would solve some of the woodworking problems that I have had over the years.

For my first project I decided to try something small and useful, a handle for my files. I figured that a handle should not be too difficult. As it turned out I would have been better off buying a one inch dowel, cut it to length, sand the edges, and drilling a hole to accept the file ends. The finished turning had torn grain and chop-outs. I tried another piece of wood figuring that I either had the wrong speed or the wood I selected was not appropriate for turning. The results were pretty much the same. I decided to try again after I did some further research. What made me get around to finding the necessary resources? After five years, my motivator to learn how to turn came down to the opening of a Woodcraft store in a nearby city.

I took some classes related to joinery and found that their staff had the knowledge and that the hands on really helped me grasp the procedures and other aspects of the subject. The first woodturning class I took was a basic course where we turned a garden dibble. First of all, I had no clue what a garden dibble was! I normally design my own woodworking project and do not usually follow a plan. I felt that I had one advantage over the other students, due to the fact that I have worked with all types of tools for

most of my life, and I normally pick-up how to use them fairly quickly. The instructor asked for:

1) some background information from the students about their experience with woodturning

2) to rate their skill level from one to ten, with ten being the best.

I stated that I had tried woodturning a few years earlier with less than desirable results and graded myself a five because of my tool experience. But my hope for a successful project was somewhat diminished when one of the other students said that he had been turning pens for some time and rated himself lower than I had rated myself. I specifically remember after this student's statement, thinking that this must be a lot harder than I originally thought. Well, by the time the class ended, I had a stubby representation of a garden dibble, but it had a good finish without sanding and no chop out or torn grain. My spirits were built back up by the end of the class.



First Woodcraft project, a garden dibble turned April 2005. The dimensions are a little off (8" l x 1-3/4 t).

Over the last two years, I have taken nine woodturning classes from Woodcraft with the majority taught by two of their staff (John and Mike)

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who are both from the British Isles and who have become my mentors. Shortly after getting to know John, he invited me to the Carolina Mountain Woodturners (CMW) meeting in Asheville, North Carolina. The first meeting we attended featured a local turner, Talmadge Murphey, and he presented "Balanced Multi-axis Pieces." When he completed the piece it had four handles. My first impression was that there was a lot more to woodturning than I first anticipated. It took almost eight months for me to get up the nerve to take a class from a professional Woodturner. Don Derry was presenting "Romancing the Curve," and that seemed like as good a place to start as any. His demonstration concentrated on the way lines are incorporated into woodturning and how to visualize how a curve will look.

In my professional life, I regularly attend seminars and listen to someone discuss a topic. My basic philosophy is that as long as I leave a seminar with one thing that I can use, I consider the time and money well spent. I have always taken notes at seminars because there is so much information that I would not remember most of it in a very short time. As a result, I do the same at the CMW monthly meetings and workshops. By taking good notes that include drawings, I have found that it makes it a lot easier to remember what was demonstrated at some point in the future. As I complete each page of notes I tear it from the pad. So that notes will not be easily mixed up, I date my notes and use unique page numbers (i.e. DD1, DD2, etc.). This allows me to place them in a loose-leaf binder in the correct order after I return home.

There are several reasons for going to club meetings or attending workshops. Let me discuss meetings first. What I found was that I left each meeting with several things that I could practice and apply to the way that I turn wood. For me, the benefits of attending a CMW meeting include: 1) watching professionals perform their techniques, their use of tools, and other practices, 2) seeing the actual tools that they use with any modifications, 3) being able to ask questions and/or hear

the professional answers to someone else's questions, and 4) talking with other club members about their turned project or discussing what you brought to show. This brings up another point. If your club has an "Instant Gallery" where members can bring their latest project, bring yours. This is one of the best ways to gauge your project's quality against the other pieces on display. If there is something there that in-

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terests you, it allows you to ask the creator questions about it. I found that I improved at a lot faster pace than if I had learned in a vacuum or basically taught myself. By seeing other woodturner's projects, the quality of my projects increased (i.e. better tool use, better finishing techniques, etc.).

But one of the greatest benefits has been in taking a hands-on class with a professional Woodturner. The professional Woodturner brings their skills and opinions to each demonstration. Since they also meet other professional woodturners in their travels, they exchange and discuss procedures, techniques, and other knowledge, which can be passed on to other Woodturners, like you and me. In many cases the fees are relatively inexpensive. I have found that by trying to duplicate what they have just demonstrated, this allows them to assist you personally. This hands-on approach allows the professional to answer any questions or concerns or just alleviate any fears that you may have before the workshop ends. This lack of interaction is the main reason why books, DVD's, and/or videos do not offer the same level of education. Since these formats cannot allow for the hands-on or personal interaction it is often harder to duplicate the shown task resulting in both; frustration and poor results. It can occur because something was not presented clearly, steps may have been glossed over, it was read wrong, or it was missed. The physical presence of the professional can alleviate any of these and others that might exist.

In conclusion:

As you consider where you want to spend your time, you need to decide if being a member of a club will offer you the following items:

- 1) Are the people in the club personable?
- 2) Are they willing to share their ideas and knowledge with others?
- 3) Does the club offer educational opportunities?
- 4) Do you want to learn new things?

The last one is probably the most important because if you only go when you have spare time or you do not feel that there is any benefit, then it will be a waste of time. Also, if you go sporadically, you will miss most of the benefits that come from being a consistently attending member.

I make every effort not to miss a club meeting. I still review workshops based on the topic and what I can apply to the way I turn wood. Ultimately, what you put into a meeting or workshop will equal or exceed what you get out of participating. One of the best ways of getting more out of attending is by getting involved by volunteering your time. This can be by assisting with set-up, during the meeting, or with clean-up after the meeting ends. But the best way to learn and understand about a club or organization is by joining the Board of Directors. You will better understand the club or organization and if necessary be in a better position to effect change. So I urge you to participate and get involved. Good luck with expanding your woodturning knowledge and horizons.

Shot Bowl Continued from Page 21

Examining the tip of my gouge I saw no nicks on the cutting edge... and the shiny metal in the bowl looked softer than steel. A couple more light cuts and still no problems. But, on a next cut something felt different.

I stopped the lathe, the bright spot was gone, but nestled in the chips inside the bowl was the remains of a .22 caliber bullet! Photo 1, left arrow, shows where the bullet was lodged. Upper right arrow shows the bowl's center. Lower arrow, and Photo 2, show the bullet.



Photo 2. Bullet with turning.

Note that there are two different cut surfaces. The first cut is when the bullet was first uncovered, the second and side cut came when the bullet was plucked from the wood from the gouge's cutting action. Removing the bowl and examining the outside showed no entry place in line with the bullet's entry channel either; an ongoing puzzle. The bowl will finish up nicely as there is enough bottom wood to eliminate the bullet's scar.

This led to some memories of wood that had nails, barbed wire, pieces of chain, etc. embedded with bark grown over the wound. Ferrous