

Lakeside Gems hosts some of the best chainsaw carvers in Canada and the world



By Bill Kilpatrick

From July 28 through July 30 Lakeside Gems hosted a special event over three days that saw six of the best chain saw carvers in Ontario gather to demonstrate their artistic talents and create some amazing artwork. The event was hosted at Lakeside Gems, but was organized by master carver Steve Kenzora. Linda Bast, owner and operator of Lakeside Gems, said that she was introduced to Kenzora during the summer of 2022 when Kenzora's daughter worked at Lakeside Gems. When Bast saw the work that Kenzora was creating she never thought that he would want to host an event at her business, "When I saw his work, I thought "This is way beyond anything that we could support," but during the fall Bast began purchasing work from Kenzora for resale in her shop. Then Kenzora offered to organize a one-day event for the fall of 2022 with three carvers and Bast agreed. "This was us testing the waters," to see if it could be successful, explained Bast. As it turned out Kenzora also thought it was a successful test run and so he began to plan for another, bigger, event.

This year's event hosted six carvers from all over Ontario including Mike Winia from London, Patrick Poell from Peterborough, Paul Denielski from Chatham, Kyle Conlon also from Peterborough, and Levi Caya from Apsley. Kenzora, who also hails from Apsley, has been carving for over 20 years has traveled all over the world and competed against some of the best carvers the world has to offer. "I've been to Australia four times and England 5 times," says Kenzora adding that three of the carvers, Winia, Caya, and himself, have competed in Canada's biggest competition held in Chetwynd British Columbia, adding however, that each person at the event is also an accomplished artist.

The gathering of carvers at Lakeside gems brought together three generations of carvers. Kenzora, who has been nicknamed 'the carving Jedi' was carving with his protégé Caya who was also carving with his protégé Poell. Caya, who began carving when he was 14, started off by whittling wood and then met Kenzora while he was in highschool and the rest, as they say, is history. Caya won the Hope British Columbia World Class Chainsaw carving competition in 2021 and is heading back to Hope to defend his title this Aug. Caya said that he enjoys making complicated pieces and has become known for adding moving parts to his pieces so that his pieces 'come to life.' Despite enjoying making complicated pieces such as a 13-foot-tall sasquatch, Caya points out that faces, especially women's and baby's faces, due to their soft features, pose a challenge for the chainsaw carver to achieve. For Caya, it's the gratification of people loving his work that keeps him going and pushing him to become better adding, 'I just appreciate that people love it.'

Winia, who came in third place in 2016 at Canada's biggest carving competition in Chetwynd British Columbia and also represented Canada at the World Chainsaw carving championship in Germany in 2015, has always had an artistic talent, 'I've been chainsaw carving for 17 years, but before that I was a sketch artist, a painter, and a concrete artist,' says Winia. When asked how he began chainsaw art he pointed out that he is also a third-generation logger who has been running chainsaws his whole life, but it wasn't until he had a family crisis that he began to carve.

His child became ill and his partner was travelling back and forth to the hospital with her and Winia was staying home to look after his other children. Money was becoming tight for the family as Winia's logging company was suffering in his absence, but for Winia family was what mattered the most stating, 'I just had to pick a lane and for me family was it.' Then one day his wife was leaving to run errands for a couple hours and Winia looked at a log laying in his front yard and said to his wife that he was going to carve a grizzly bear for the front porch while she was gone and he did, and by the time his wife arrived home he had two people stop and offer him money for the carving. He then went into his first competition after six months of carving and despite being up against carvers with years and decades of experience Winia won first prize, much to the chagrin of the other competitors who didn't believe he had only been carving for six months. Winia then went on to win many events and eventually got to stand on the podium for the world championships in 2015 winning third place and as Winia points out, 'If you can get on this podium you're considered a master.'

Winia, Bast, and Kenzora are hoping that this is the start of a much bigger event for the Bancroft area, but as Winia points out, 'In order for me to carve I have to be able to achieve certain [monetary] numbers, unless I'm doing a fun event like this. This is not about money it's about coming here with my buds and helping them promote Bancroft and getting an event going.' The hope is that they will be able to get some local sponsors to help promote a carving event for next summer that will draw some big crowds who will get to witness world class chainsaw art in action.

For those who would like to know more about chainsaw carving Steve Kenzora can be found on Facebook under the title Canadian Sheild Chainsaw Carving. Anyone interested in helping to sponsor a carving event can reach Linda Bast by phone at 613-332-9894; or visit Lakeside Gems web page at www.lakesidegems.com.